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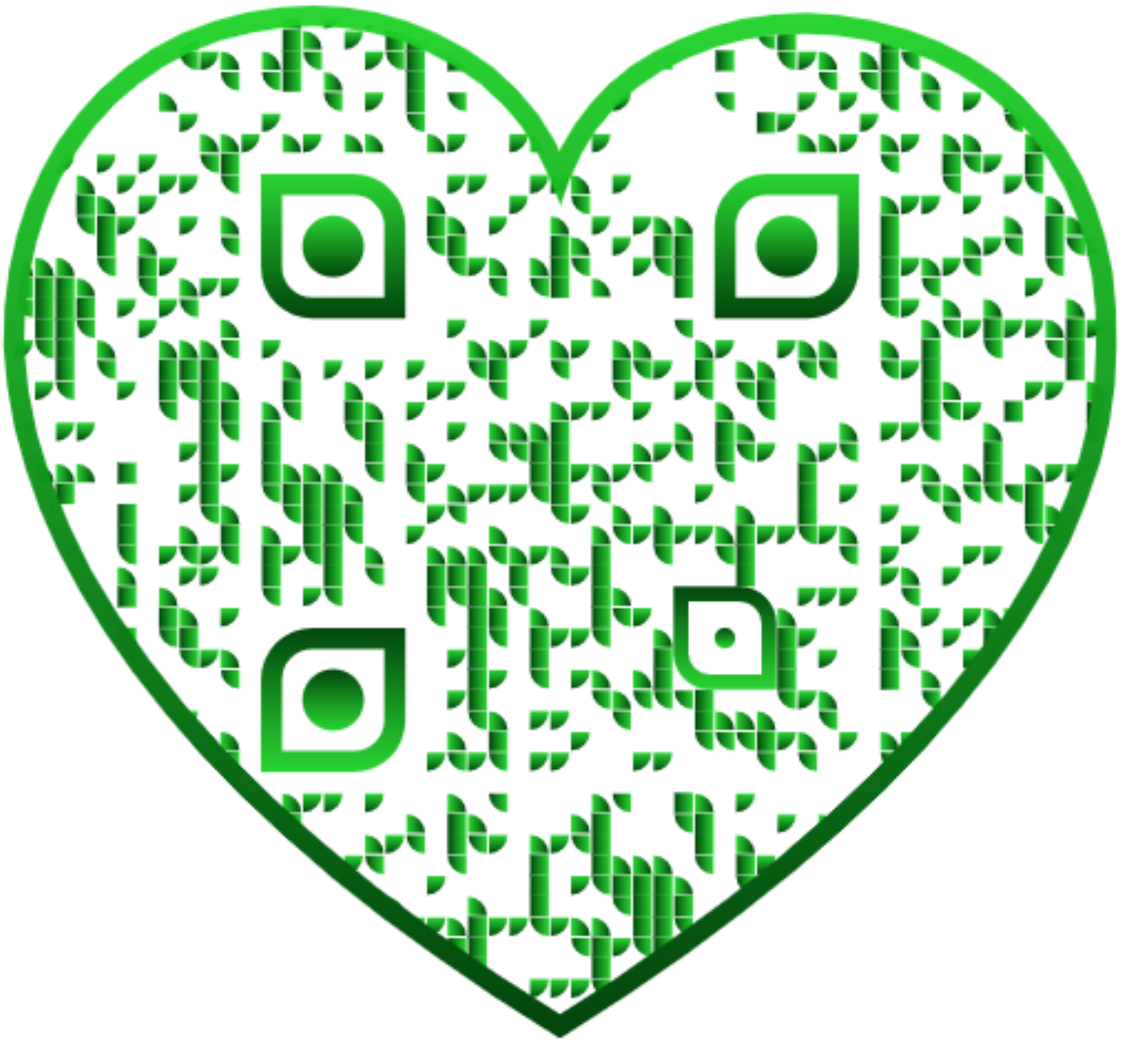
EMPIRE STATE BASTARD

BLUES SOLO BASICS

TOM DELONGE & STEVE LACY STRATS

REVIEWED
STUDIO JTM ST20H
MARSHALL'S VINTAGE-INSPIRED ALL-VALVE HEAD



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Welcome...

I think it's fair to say that if you don't like the tone coming from your amp, well, you're probably gonna change it somehow! Of course, how far each of us takes this tonal tweakery comes down to individual preferences. For some, a guitar or maybe two, a carefully chosen amp and perhaps a couple of pedals is all that's required. Others go down the rabbit hole of large guitar collections, multi-amp set-ups and huge pedalboards to create their sounds. Point is, wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, your tone matters. It's the key to how you express yourself on your guitar.

And so this month we're taking a look at all things tone. You'll find lessons on setting up your guitar to get the best sound, creative ways to use your amp and effects, and how to get the best sound from your (gasp!) digital gear. We have pro tone tips from funk-rock virtuoso Nuno Bettencourt and roots-rockers Rebecca and Megan Lovell of Larkin Poe. And rounding off our festival of tone is a five-page tutorial on how to play like the greatest icons of guitar tone in history.

Elsewhere, we quiz Simon Neil and Mike Vennart on their heavy metal side project, Empire State Bastard; Nothing But Thieves talk us through their "retro futuristic" new sound; and you'll find feature interviews with Ultra Q, Saint Agnes, Grace Potter and more.

Our reviews section features a quartet of giant names, as we look at new gear from Marshall, Fender, Gibson and Gretsch. And the guitar on the cover? We'll be taking a look at that next month...

Enjoy the issue, and I'll see you next month!

Chris Bird Editor

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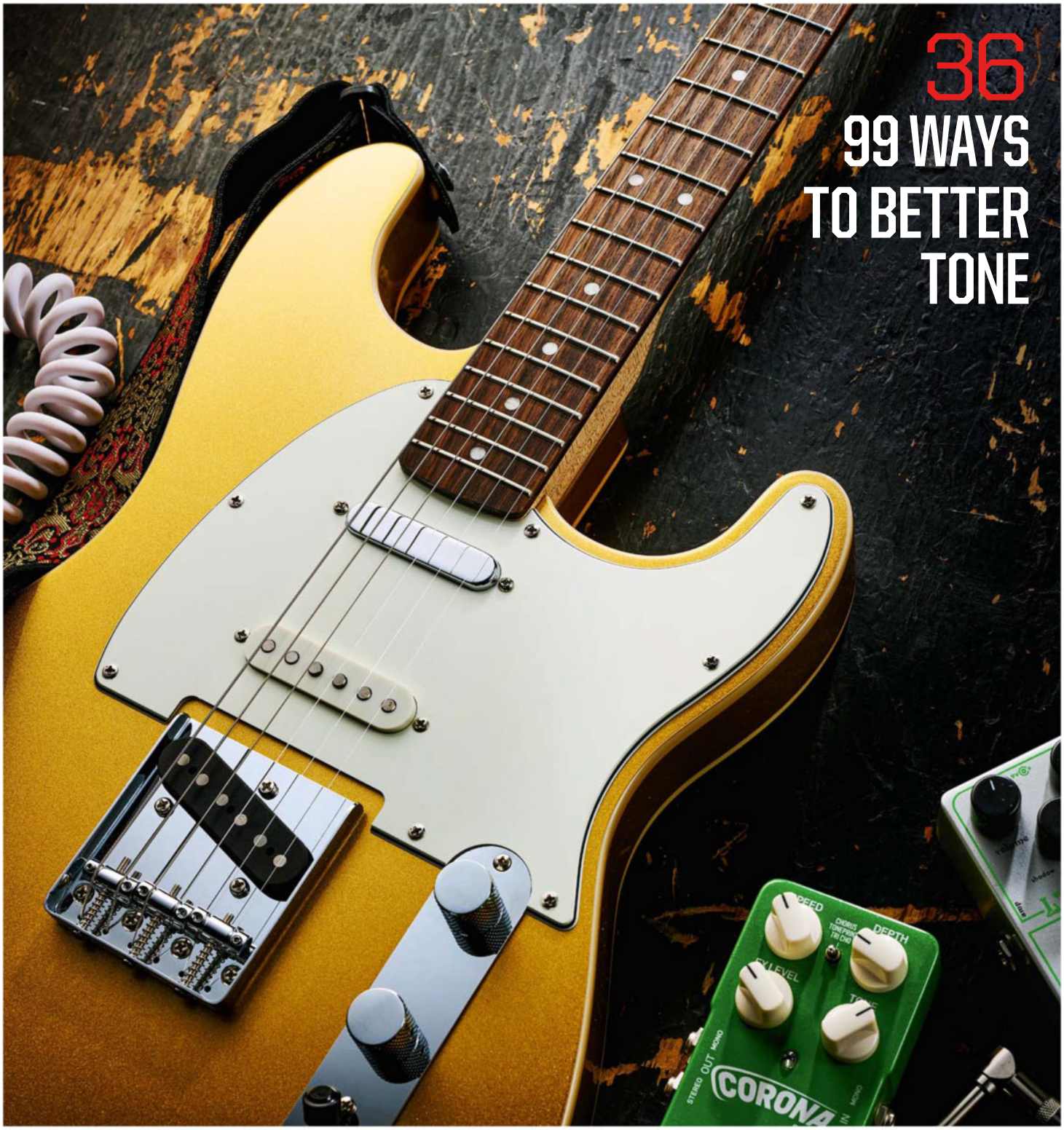

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Audio & Video

Find your audio and video content online at:

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Type this link into a web browser on any computer, smartphone or tablet and you'll be directed to TG's website at guitarworld.com. Here you'll find all the audio and video for the issue, available to download or stream.

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WIDE
DOUBLING+ DELAY
REFLECT
AMBIENCE
NON-LINEAR
MULTI-HEAD
MODERN
MIN
ON/OFF
MEMORY

Words Stuart Williams Photography Olly Curtis

SPACE, TIME, CONTINUUM

Boss serves up a multi-mode delay pedal, and there isn't a digital model in sight

We're used to multi-mode delay pedals, featuring every conceivable emulation of classic analogue echoes. But perhaps we're a little too used to digital recreations? Boss says so, which is why its new DM-101 delivers its delays via eight Bucket Brigade chips for 100 per cent analogue signal processing.

Tipped as "the ultimate analogue delay", there are 12 modes onboard including Classic (with up to 1200ms of delay time), Vintage (based on the DM-2 Delay), Multi-Head, Pan and more. But, just because the signal path is analogue, doesn't mean you're limited to old school features. The DM-101 has four preset memories for recalling your sounds, and the digitally-controlled clocking allows you to tap your tempo or set the pedal to timed subdivisions, just as you would on a digital pedal. There's MIDI control via a pair of mini-jack I/O sockets and the DM-101 can also accept a footswitch or expression pedal for hand-free switching.

Now, as you might expect, an all-analogue delay pedal as well stocked as this doesn't come cheap, with a price tag of £449. We'll be checking it out in closer detail soon.

UP CLOSE

All-analogue signal

The DM-101 includes eight BBD chips, giving you 100 per cent analogue delay processing.

Modern features

It's got tap tempo, beat subdivisions, recall-able memories and MIDI for modern control.

Delay

With 12 modes, stereo operation and up to 1200ms of delay time, the DM-101 looks set to have you covered.

RISING STAR
Abraham Alexander photographed by Crystal Wise for *Fort Worth Magazine.*

ALBUM

"THE GUITAR IS A SHIELD AND A WEAPON!"

INTRODUCING GIBSON'S FIRST MARQUEE ARTIST: ABRAHAM ALEXANDER

Gibson recently announced its Marquee Artist programme as a new sub-sector of the brand, designed to assist emerging artists with career growth. Their flagship signing is Texas-based songwriter Abraham Alexander, whose debut album *SEA/SONS* has just been released.

What's changed for you since becoming Gibson's first Marquee Artist?
It's the support more than anything. I like to say that the second person who believes in a dream is more important than the dreamer themselves because they validate that dream and they validate the aspiration. It's a crazy thought that the individual who builds the guitar that I'm able to express myself with also believes in me. There's this circle dynamic being built and it just adds more fuel to the fire.

Tell us about your go-to guitar for writing songs...
Right now, it's the Epiphone Dove. I wrote my entire album on the Epiphone. There's something about the way it looks which also plays into how you carry it and the sound of it. To me, it's so easy. It's so striking when you look at it, but at the same time, it gives me the character I need and the energy when I'm writing.

Photo Getty

You also play an Epiphone ES-339. What is it about Epiphone models that wins over their Gibson equivalents?
It's funny because Gibson and Epiphone – for me – are one and the same. But, I feel like there is a richness within the Epiphone. I've seen a lot of songwriters really make that part of their arsenal. It's the fact that you can get it and not be afraid to take it on the road or be afraid that something's going to happen. It builds character and it builds this energy. For me, that's everything. I've got a Gibson ES-335 Larry Carlton as well. That's one of my favourite guitars. Gary Clark Jr., who's also on my album, was the first one to play that guitar, so there's a lot of history there.

What other gear couldn't you live without?
A tuner! I also have this pedal called the Steel String Supreme and it's a Dumble sort of turned into a pedal. I feel like it takes my tone just a little bit over the edge. I add it on the acoustic as well and it gives this real shine.

Your songs are incredibly personal. Has getting up on stage and bearing your soul to strangers ever been challenging?
At first. Over time, it has become a lot easier. Ultimately, being vulnerable is strength. The more that you're vulnerable, the less the pain and those insecurities have a hold over you. Every time I'm able to perform these songs that are so personal, I'm chipping away at the armour of who I am – the pride and the defensive wall that I'm carrying to try to protect myself from something that I'm feeling.

People often say it's easier to perform with a guitar than without one. Is that the case for you?
Absolutely! You're bearing so much of yourself out, and holding something in your hands is like getting a hug. It's surreal, but it is a shield. It's a shield and it's a weapon all at once!
Ellie Rogers

REPRO AMPS

SUNN AMPLIFICATION

Sunn – the much-loved guitar amp brand played by the likes of Jimi Hendrix, Pete Townshend and The Melvins' Buzz Osborne – has been revived thanks to Fender teaming up with Mission Engineering. Fender has owned the Sunn name since the 80s, but it's laid dormant… until now. In a statement, Fender announced that with the help of Mission, "Sunn will be bringing back historic reproductions of classic Sunn designs," as well as "new products that incorporate modern technology" before the year is out. To start, that includes the KT88 valve-driven S100 and S200, alongside the solid-state-driven Beta Lead and Beta Bass heads. Head to sunnamps.com for more info.

GUITARS

FENDER X LOOG

You might have heard of Loog before – the brand that puts guitars in the hands of kids with its easy-to-play, three-stringers. Now, the company has partnered with Fender for a pair of three-string guitars based on two iconic designs. The Fender x Loog Stratocaster and Telecaster (£189) pack a lightweight, Paulownia body and 19-fret, 20.6" scale-length maple neck into a compact format, ideal for kids. Each has one single coil pickup and one volume control, plus they come with access to the Loog Guitar app, a set of flashcards, picks and a Leo Fender For Kids booklet to learn about the man himself.

SHOP

GIBSON GARAGE

It's been rumoured for a while, but now Gibson has confirmed that its Gibson Garage London store will be opening in early 2024. Located just off Oxford Street, the flagship store looks to replicate the Nashville Gibson Garage experience, and promises to be a one-stop shop for all things Gibson, Epiphone, Kramer, Mesa/Boogie and Maestro. With over 4500 feet of space, fans of the brands will be able to try and buy the latest gear, merch and accessories direct from the guitar giant. There's no date yet, but watch this space!

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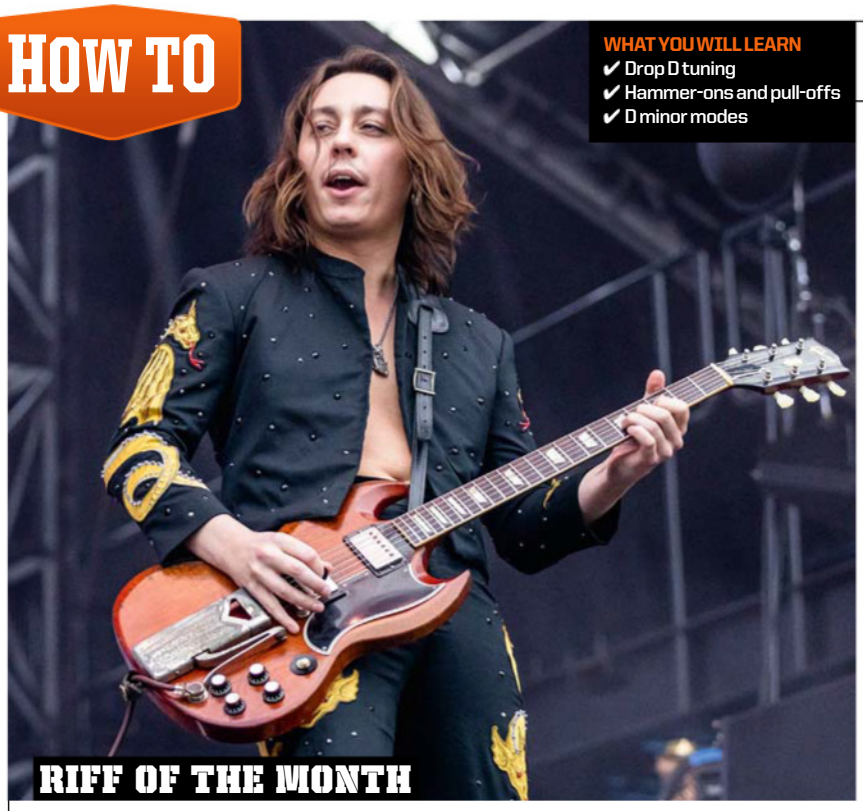
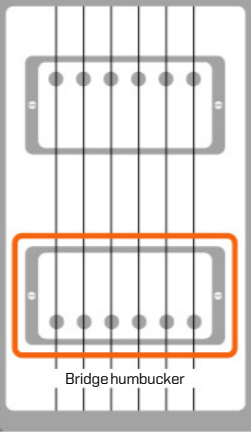


WHAT YOU WILL LEARN
- ✔ Drop D tuning
- ✔ Hammer-ons and pull-offs
- ✔ D minor modes

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL OVERDRIVE



You'll need to tune your guitar to drop D (DADGBE from low to high) and dial in a no-nonsense, classic '70s rock-style overdrive tone. Jake Kiszka plays a '61 Gibson 'Les Paul' SG (early models took the 'Les Paul' moniker until around 1963 when they were renamed SG), here set to its bridge humbucker, primarily through Marshall JCM800 and Astoria amps. The tone is very present so keep your guitar's onboard tone and volume set to maximum and turn up the middle and treble controls on your amp if required.

GRETA VAN FLEET

The Falling Sky

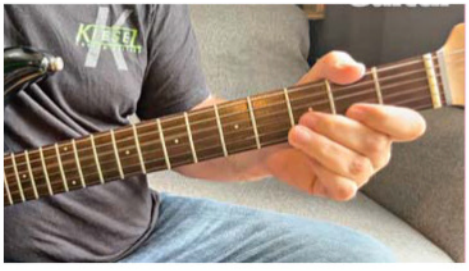
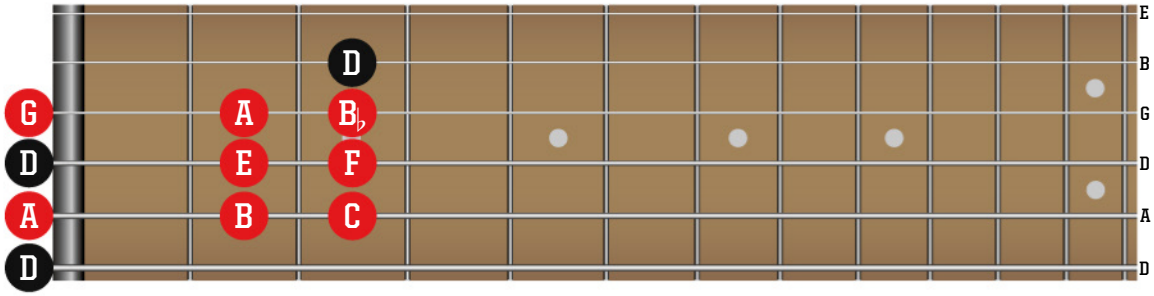
This month's riff is the fourth single from Greta Van Fleet's latest album *Starcatcher*. The song's intro is a Zeppelin-esque hard rocking riff courtesy of the band's resident tonehound Jake Kiszka. The part is played in drop D tuning and uses open strings and notes at the 2nd and 3rd frets. For the opening phrase, start with a D5 powerchord played from the sixth to the second strings.

Next, strum the upper three strings of the chord before pulling off from the 3rd fret to open on the fourth string. Play the next seven notes entirely with your second finger on the 2nd and 3rd frets, using a pull-off and a slide to move from note to note.

For the second half of the riff, start with the open sixth string, play the three-string D5 shape again, then use your first and second fingers to play the descending pull-off pattern.

We've played the riff slowly for you in our video, where you can pick up all the finer details.

CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 0:00–0:21
Tempo: 92bpm
Key/scale: D Dorian/Aeolian
Main techniques: Picking, hammer-ons and pull-offs



The riff is played in the open position and makes use of the four open bass strings as well as notes at the 2nd and 3rd frets. The notes used come from the D minor pentatonic scale (D F G A C), which puts us firmly in the key of D minor. Interestingly, Jake uses both a B♭, which suggests the D natural minor scale (D E F G A B♭ C) and a B natural, which suggests D Dorian (D E F G A B C).

Photo Getty

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FIVE WAYS TO...

BETTER BLUES PHRASING

Get your mojo workin' with TG's easy lesson on lead guitar

The blues jam session is a rite of passage for every novice guitarist. Whereas preparing a set of songs to play with fellow musicians can be difficult, and a bit of a time-sink, it's relatively easy to get to grips with the good ol' 12-bar blues in loads of key signatures. This can make those early blues jams a breeze as far as chords are concerned, but what do you do when it comes to taking a solo? How do you know what to play?

Well, that's exactly what we're tackling here as we look at five different ways to approach blues soloing. We'll cover some key scale shapes (don't leave home without 'em; they're absolute, 100 per cent, nailed-on essentials), plus some more musical and textural approaches. For our purposes these all sound great in a pure blues context, but they'll also work in other related genres, from blues-rock to country or even jazz – with a bit of creative input from you, of course.

If there's one overarching tip here it's to take your time. Almost no other genre is as open and improvisational as blues, and if you're jamming, you'll have time to develop your initial ideas. And of course blues is best when subtlety is employed – by which we mean the gaps and the notes you don't play are as important as the ones you do!

So read on and try out our tab examples inspired by the Chicago blues icons of the '50s and '60s to today's latest and greatest.

1 USE THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE

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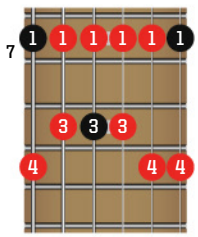
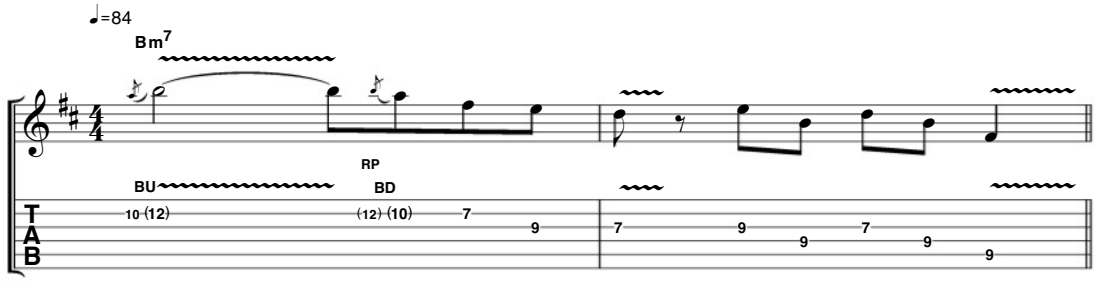


B minor pentatonic scale (shape 1)

Probably the best known scale of all, the minor pentatonic is a great starting point for soloing. We're using a simple approach here, playing over a 'parallel' minor 7th chord (which means they have the same root note – so B minor pentatonic over Bm7) in our B.B. King-inspired lick.

Words, guitars and backing Chris Bird **Photo** Alison Clarke

2 USE TWO-NOTE 'DIADS'

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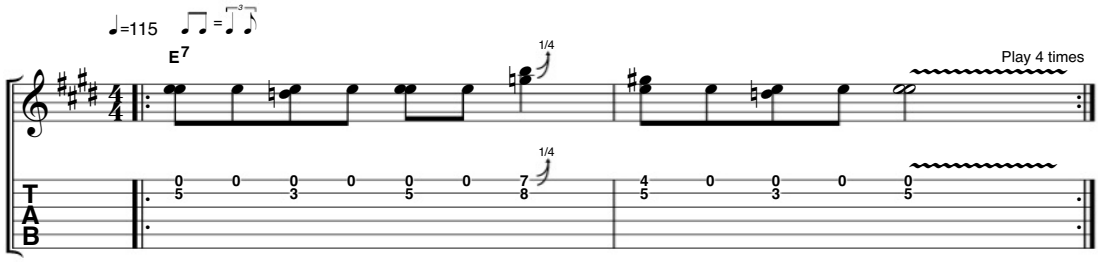

The diad at the end of bar 1 sounds great over the E7 chord thanks to some bluesy dissonance. Our diad includes a G note, but you can prevent an ear-busting semitone clash with E7's G♯ by gradually applying a quarter-tone bend on your G. The 3rd-fret D also appears in E7, but, again, has a little bluesy edge when played against the open E string.

3 SPARSE PHRASING CAN WORK

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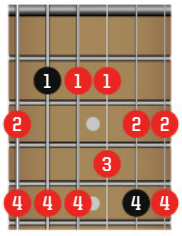
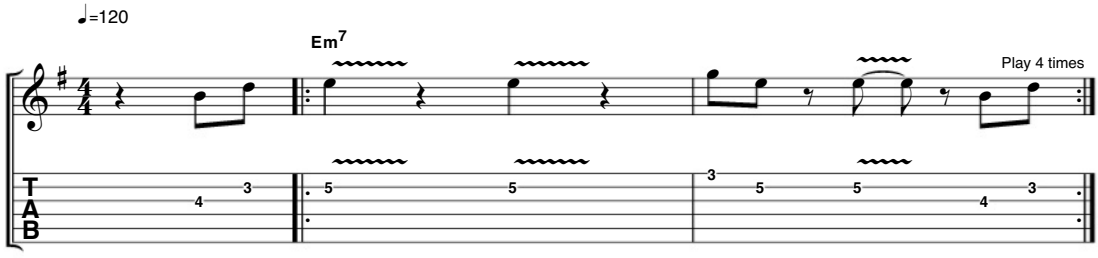


E minor pentatonic scale (shape 2)



We're taking inspiration from the great Robert Cray here, a master of understated blues phrasing. The lesson to learn is that the gaps between notes can be important – so resist the urge to widdle endlessly, and think about breaking up your own licks into short, singable phrases. We're using shape 2 of the E minor pentatonic scale.

4 BEND FURTHER

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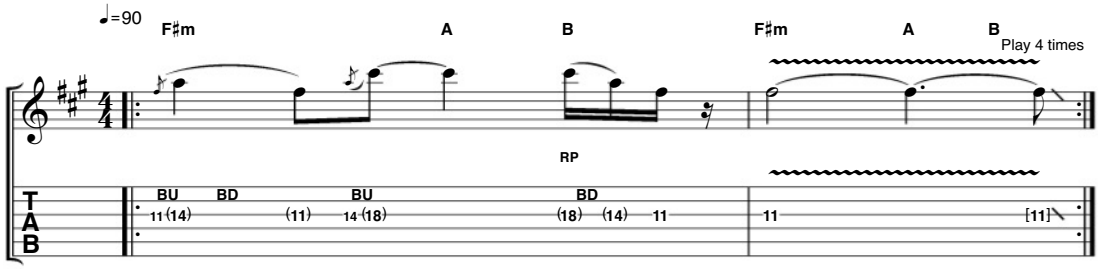

We're all used to finger-friendly semitone and tone bends – but you can go further! Albert King and Buddy Guy were early masters of what we'll call 'over-bending', employing bends of three or four semitones. Everyone from Eric Clapton to John Mayer has followed in their footsteps. Light-gauge strings or detuning your guitar can make it easier.

5 SCREAM WHEN YOU GO HIGH!

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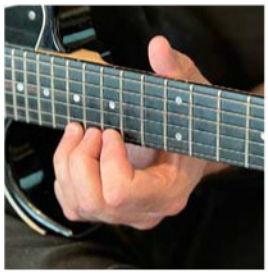
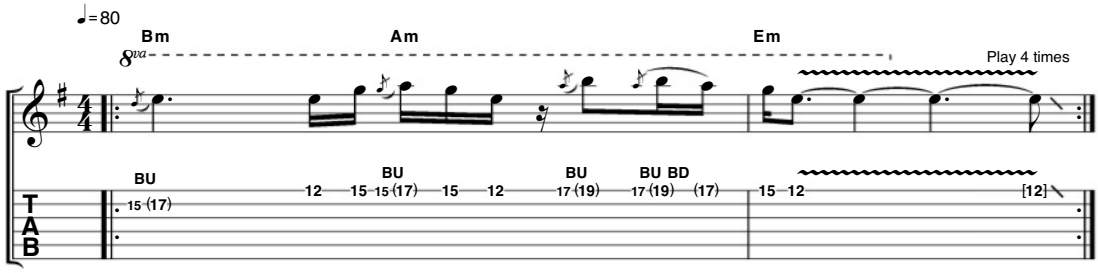



Get familiar with the top end of the fretboard, dial in plenty of drive and be prepared to make your guitar scream. We're taking our inspiration from Grammy-winning modern day blues and R&B hero Gary Clark Jr here.

"IF YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY A PEDAL CALLED 'TOTAL SONIC ANNIHILATION' THEN YOU NEED TO PUT DOWN YOUR GUITAR RIGHT NOW!"

SIMON NEIL

Words Jenna Scaramanga **Photos** Gavin Smart

"IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE EXTREME..."

A Biffy Clyro and Slayer supergroup? You'd better believe it. Dave Grohl is already a fan of **Empire State Bastard** – Simon Neil and Mike Vennart's "mortally raging" metal side project

You probably didn't have Biffy Clyro's frontman Simon Neil and live guitarist Mike Vennart down as the guys most likely to produce 2023's scuzziest metal album, but with the heavyweight additions of ex-Slayer drummer Dave Lombardo and ex-Bitch Falcon bassist Naomi Macleod, they have produced a serious contender.

Empire State Bastard began years ago as a pipe dream that Simon and Mike discussed on tour. "It was always going to be extreme," says Simon. "We didn't want to just make a noisy record flippantly. We needed a valid reason to express that rage."

With his frustrations at boiling point following Brexit and the pandemic, and Mike recovering from "a horrendous experience with the far right," they found their reason. "I was just mortally raging," fumes Mike. That fury is etched in the grooves of *Rivers Of Heresy*, Empire State Bastard's snarling debut. The pair speak to TG together via Zoom about the making of the album – and they begin by explaining why Simon barely plays any guitar on it…

How do you form a band with the guitar player from one of the UK's biggest bands and then not have him play much guitar in it?

Simon: When you put it like that, it sounds preposterous, doesn't it? My main worry was that when I pick up a guitar, it sounds like Biffy. I didn't want to pick up guitar to begin with – so that it would have no resemblance to Biffy songs. I played a little bit of noisy guitar and some more kind of effect stuff. I think that was so important to let Mike do what he's doing. There are a few people I play guitar around that make me feel like an amateur, and unfortunately, Mike is one of those people!

Mike: When we first talked about it, I just assumed that he would play guitar. But when it came to the writing, I just went at it and did my own thing. I was experimenting with a new tuning, C standard, which you would think wouldn't make such a drastic difference, but the feel of the guitar in that tuning was so inspiring. I'm ordinarily more of a sort of single coil player, you know, like clean, really nice, spidery guitar sounds, wiry stuff. This tuning made me just want to make f*cking riffs. It's never been a forte of mine, but it came together this time.

How did you get Dave Lombardo of Slayer fame involved?

Mike: When I was writing, I'd have a double espresso and a shot of tequila, and I'd set up the recording session. The bass track would say Shane Embury [Napalm Death], and the drum programming track that I was making always just said 'Lombardo' on it. Little did I know that we'd have that guy playing the real drums on it.

Simon: Because there was a pandemic, we just thought, 'Should we email him? We know he's at home!' Within 24 hours, he said, 'I am going to make time to make this record right now. What's your deadline?' His positivity is what cemented the band. When Dave Lombardo, the primo modern metal drummer, says that they're going to drop everything to work on it, that was when we started to take it seriously.

What gear did you use?

Mike: When I was writing it, I used a Hagström Super Swede, kind of a cheap thing. It just would not stay in tune at all, but it had P90s in it. There's just something about playing metal on single coils. It's really fat, plenty of mids. There was something about the weight of the strings, using a higher gauge. I used 13-56. A wound G is absolutely imperative, otherwise nothing will work. There is something about the resonance of it in that tuning. It's like you're playing a f*cking tree or something. On the record, I used a Gibson Explorer with a DiMarzio Tone Zone in it. When I was learning in the '80s, I was big on super-strat shredder dudes, so the Tone Zone is something I've always been a big fan of because it's so loud and there's so much mids. The amp was entirely a Green Matamp GT1.

EMPIRE STATE OF MIND
Simon Neil: Our riffs are *this* big!

I didn't use any pedals on the record, except a Boss HM-2 Heavy Metal on one section, dimed for that chainsaw sound. Other than that, it is just the amp distortion on the GT1, completely dimed. If you turn up the gain and then turn up the master volume, you've just got this incredible grainy distortion. With the bass maxed, it's absolutely incendiary. I'm obsessed with it.
I absolutely wanted to avoid that tight modern metal sound. It's quite flubby, quite a woolly kind of sound. It's got more in common with a Big Muff or something like that, but it's an actual amp distortion.
Simon: When I'd finished all my vocals, I put a few guitars on just to make things noisier. I played my Strat most of the time, and I've always got the [Boss] Metal Zone in there. I had a couple of Death By Audio pedals that you can loop your effects back through. There's one called Total Sonic Annihilation, and if you don't want to play a pedal called Total Sonic Annihilation then you need to put down your guitar right now. I was also putting keyboards through guitar pedals and amps. So mainly using my Marshall stack and a lot of my regular guitar pedals, but really f*cking around with it, putting three pedals through one pedal. A lot of it ended up in a dead end because when you're dealing with so much saturation, it can kind of swallow a mix.

What kind of guitar parts are you playing?

Simon: I was trying to play in a way that I have never played my guitar. At points, I was trying to play left-handed, so there was no delicacy or subtlety. I'd be playing a couple of notes and manipulating them using octave effects. A couple of things that sound like keyboards are actually guitars – the way bands like My Bloody Valentine would approach their songs. You know, it's, it's about texture and scope and trying to make it a bit more cinematic. Mike's riffs were very to the point. I felt that my job was to f*ck up songs that were already completely f*cked up.

A lot of your influences are really lo-fi compared to Biffy. How did you get the right sound?

Mike: The most important thing was to make sure that Lombardo's drums sounded real. Another reason he's stood out as such a singular voice in metal is because he's never succumbed to drum samples or quantization. His kit sounds incredibly natural and woody. He's always sounded like he's about to derail any minute. Whereas, there's so much metal that for years now has just been so gridded and sterile. We call it CGI metal. It isn't real, and it just doesn't sound heavy.
Simon: I think Mike referenced the Melvins a couple of times when we were mixing it. We referenced some Steve Albini drum sounds just for their size and honesty. It almost would have been easier to make it shiny, and we wanted it to sound real. We tried to get that balance of the power of a well-produced album, but still with that grottiness and grime of some of those early '90s black metal records. I wanted to make sure that when you press play on this album, that it had the muscle it needed, without being overproduced.

> "SO MUCH METAL IS SO GRIDDED AND STERILE. WE CALL IT 'CGI METAL'. IT ISN'T REAL, AND IT JUST DOESN'T SOUND HEAVY"
> MIKE VENNART

What's it been like playing this stuff live?

Mike: When we were getting together, I had an inkling, quite rightly, that Dave was gonna play everything a lot faster. That guy is so sensitive to caffeine, he's a maniac! You feel like a wild animal, looking this guy in the face while he's grinning evilly at you, like, 'Oh yeah, can you keep up with that? Let's go!' It's the most exciting thing that you can do on stage because he knows that he's bringing it, and he's really challenging you to step up. I still feel like a 15-year-old boy listening to Slayer in my room.
Simon: When we were playing Glastonbury, one of my friends bumped into Dave Grohl and he was like, 'Oh, I'm so sorry I can't make the Empire State Bastard gig.' And I'm like, 'How the f*ck does Dave Grohl know about Empire State Bastard already?' It blew my mind!

Is this album a one-off, or will there be more?

Simon: I've unlocked this part of my mind and body now. I know I'm gonna need to open this tap every couple of years and get the vitriol out. It also makes me fall back in love with Biffy again, because it's so different.
Mike: I think it would be a damn shame not to do more. I don't really care if anybody likes it one way or the other. I'm very lucky that anybody does, but we're all having such a good time that it'd be ridiculous not to do more of it.
***Rivers Of Heresy* is out on September 1.**

Words Jenna Scaramanga

"It's more guitar focused this time"

On their first number one album, **Nothing But Thieves** mix guitars with synths and prog-rock influences with danceable beats. It's a sound they call "retro-futuristic"...

Not many bands hit their fourth album still on an upward trajectory, but Nothing But Thieves are still climbing. After headlining London's O2 Arena for the first time on the back of 2021's *Moral Panic*, they've entered the UK album chart at #1 for the first time with latest effort *Dead Club City*. It's an album that finds the band incorporating more synths as they flirt with dance and hip-hop grooves, but it's also a concept album that takes cues from Rush and ELO. Guitarist Joe Langridge-Brown calls it "retro-futuristic", and it proves the band can get more creatively ambitious and expand their audience at the same time.

In an era of squeezed budgets it's increasingly rare for a band to have the luxury of time to make an album, but by recording closer to home with guitarist/keyboardist Dominic Craik co-producing, Nothing But Thieves gave themselves room to experiment. "Previously we've worked with Mike Crossy in LA," explains Dom. "We would pitch up there for like six, seven weeks, and your deadline was your deadline."

Joe agrees. "We'd got stuck in a pattern where if something didn't go our way in the studio and we wanted to re-record, that was just tough. This allowed us to experiment. We recorded one song, *City Haunts*, I think five times, chasing something we felt we'd lost. In previous projects, maybe that would have been lost forever."

Giving themselves room to create a concept album risked sounding self-indulgent, an accusation they've dodged by keeping the average song length under four minutes. Said Joe: "That was a conversation this year: 'How far can we push the prog, without sounding like it's a cliché of a prog album?'" Lead track *Welcome To The DCC* is enhanced by a Taurus synth bass inspired by Rush's Geddy Lee. "It does this kind of crazy monophonic rumble thing that you can't get from anything else," grins Dom.

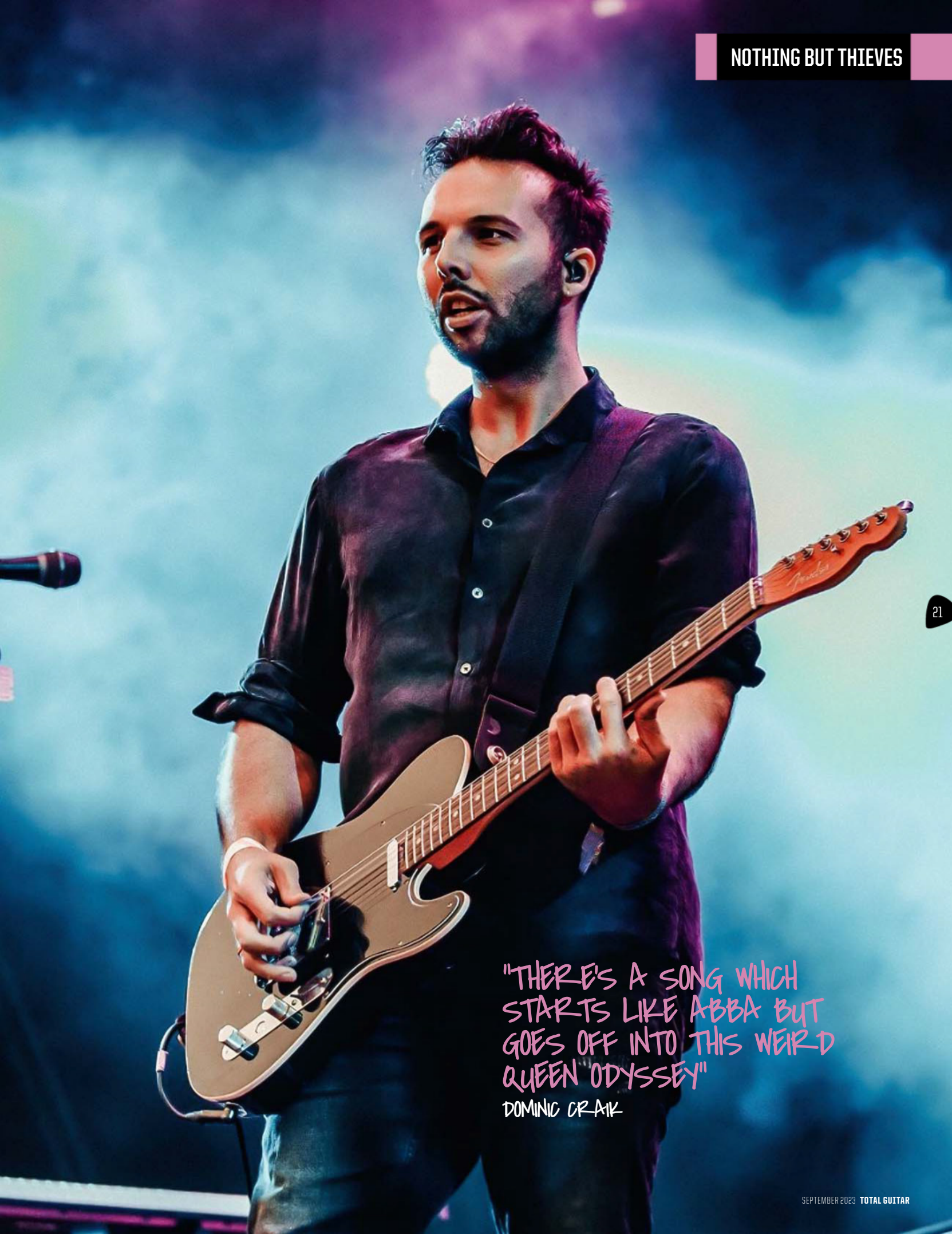
"ELO's *Time* was an album listened to a hell of a lot," Joe continues. "They were doing a lot of early vocoder stuff, which we experimented with. The whole thing is trying not to be pastiche about it, making it relevant and feel like an album that's made now, but it being influenced by that stuff."

Incorporating synths into rock is a path fraught with danger, and, as producer, Dom was careful to do it without compromising their identity as a guitar band. "If you follow a similar signal path with the synths as you do with the guitars, you're able to have them live more harmonically and cohesively together," he explains. "I rarely record a synth that isn't going through some sort of distortion. It can go from light saturation, creating more harmonic overtones in the top end, to fully choked out. I use a Thermionic Culture Vulture. Distortion can be your friend when trying to sit synths with more organic instruments."

Doubling guitar parts with synths helped with this balancing act. "On something like *Welcome To The DCC*, there's a synth bassline layered with the guitar," Joe says. "That meant that it didn't feel like a massive departure for the band. There was an inherent rock quality that was still in these songs that were very different sounding."

The marriage of synth and guitar was helped by his latest gear purchase. "I started playing guitar because of *All My Life*, the Foo Fighters song. In the video, Dave Grohl is playing this Plexiglas Dan Armstrong guitar. This was the year I said, 'I think I've finally earned my stripes enough to warrant buying one.' It's not wood, so it has a very different tonal quality, more synthy than normal guitars. That really factored into the other synth work."

Elsewhere, Joe was using his mini-humbucker-equipped '70s Les Paul Goldtop and a Gretsch Panther. A Danelectro and a 12-string Strat also saw some action. Dom's main guitar is a rare Dicky Betts signature Gibson SG. "It's one of those magic guitars," he raves. "I've tried so many other SGs and it's just not the same. We do a lot of back-to-back comparing guitars, tracking five playing the same part to



"THERE'S A SONG WHICH STARTS LIKE ABBA BUT GOES OFF INTO THIS WEIRD QUEEN ODYSSEY"

DOMINIC CRAIK

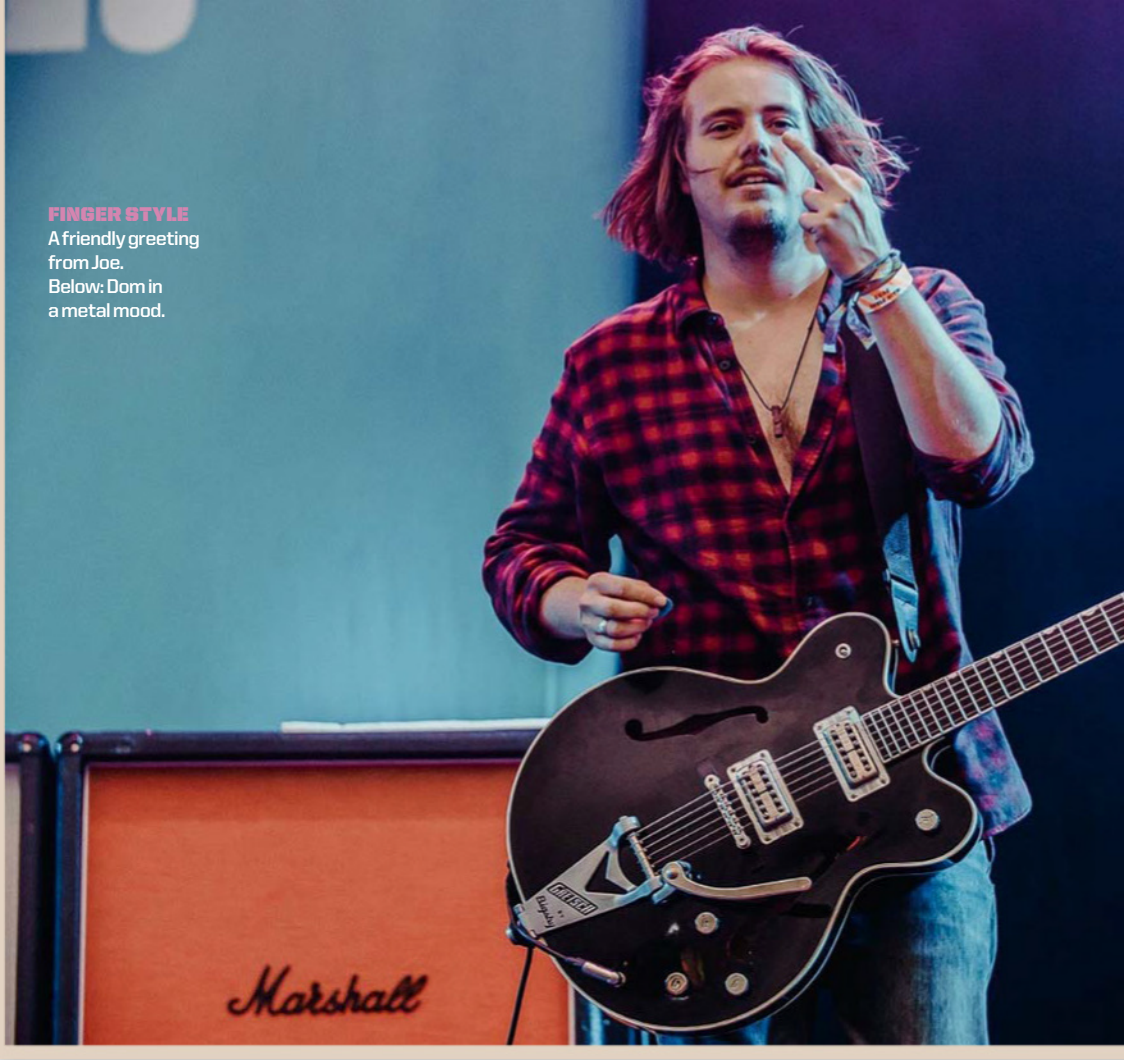
get an idea what's sitting right. That one's normally hard to beat. It's really high-output, and so midrange forward that you don't really have to try too hard to get it voiced in a mix. We were also using a '70s Jag for jangly single-coil sounds, anything that needed more articulation on the picking."

As for amps, the band hardly used any, but are not exactly forthcoming about what they used instead. "It's quite nice – we haven't had gear secrets before," Dom smiles knowingly before Joe adds: "There's one or two things, pedal and preamp-wise, that are the sound of the album. I'll tell you what, when we discover something else that's really good, we'll let you know these secrets! One of the reasons that we ended up with Dom producing the record was because the demos had these direct preamp tones. To change it seemed to change the vibe of the demos too much."

Despite not spilling the beans on the specific gear, Dom does explain the main signal chain. "Most of the starting points are a humbucker guitar into a multi-band distortion pedal, into a preamp, into an EQ. The EQ bump normally wants to be in between 900 Hertz and 1.3k. It just sounds cool as f*ck. A lot of my favorite bands from Queens Of The Stone Age through to T. Rex have a lot of quite honky humbucker tones. That's where some of the '70s influence comes in on the guitars."

There are no speaker emulations, surprisingly, just the EQ'd direct guitar sounds. "The EQ is more additive than subtractive," Dom says. "It's usually taken as far as we can go without it sounding silly, so we'll max out and then pull it back. On this particular preamp there's a top-end shelf that you can bump up. You want to hear it just poking its head out above the bass, between the cymbals and the snare. We actually stopped using a lot of cymbals on this record. That helps give visibility to the guitars and lets them do heavy lifting in sections that would usually be relying on hihats, crashes, and rides to get that lift. We were orientating that for more of a guitar-focused thing this time."

Nothing But Thieves' refusal to reveal their gear reminds us of fellow Essex rockers Nova Twins, who are equally stubborn about their tone secrets. Dom laughs as he recalls a recent gig where the two acts played together and he



FINGER STYLE
A friendly greeting from Joe. Below: Dom in a metal mood.

observed Novas bassist Georgia South in action. "I saw Georgia's 'board, or what I presume are pedals underneath tape and re-housing and all sorts of sh*t. She literally has it covered up for the cameras as well. It's amazing."

Surely there must be *some* gear they can show us? Dom begins producing pedals from a studio shelf. "This didn't get used once," he laughs, holding up a Boss DS-1. He then produces a GE-7 ("one of the best pedals of all time"), and an RE-20 Space Echo: "This is really good if you don't know how to get out of one section and get into the next one. You just hold down the self-oscillate pedal and that'll do it!" Finally, he lands on the Game Changer Audio Plasma. "This one got some use. You can blow out the bottom end pretty mad on this thing, and it's got a bolt of lightning running through it. What's more rock 'n' roll than that?"

New tones gave the band the chance to try new styles as well. "We never wanted to be a band that stagnated," claims Joe. "Maybe we overdid that in the early albums. There's a lot of flitting around different genres, but it meant our fans expect something different. It's actually very nice when you're in the studio." They took advantage of that to indulge some Brian May-like composition techniques. "For the solo in *Foreign Language* there was a lot of interlocking harmony parts happening. That's a fun day in the studio!"

"I STARTED PLAYING GUITAR BECAUSE OF ALL MY LIFE BY FOO FIGHTERS"

JOE LANGRIDGE-BROWN

That was far from the only such excursion. "There's a song called *Do You Love Me Yet?* which starts a bit like an ABBA tune, with a distorted Rhodes, and it goes off into this weird Queen odyssey thing," Dom enthuses. "That has a load of harmony guitars interweaving. There were those moments that we were trying to inject, where it didn't sound too indulgent or stupid. Just a little nod to some of that kind of fun experimentation that used to happen way more frequently."

TRY, TRY AGAIN... "We recorded one song five times, chasing something we felt we'd lost," Joe says.

While Nothing But Thieves continue to conquer new worlds, young rock bands are having a tough time conquering the UK mainstream. What made them break through? "We were talking about this the other day," muses Joe. "We came up in a very short but definite era of bands in the UK. There was Royal Blood, Wolf Alice, Slaves and us that came out in the same couple of years and managed to have some longevity. Then it became difficult."

"I don't think the output has dropped in quality. There's more music out there than ever and you've got to be quality to survive," Dom reflects. "We've always tried to write the strongest songs that we can. There's an element of luck with it as well. So it's hard to know, but we're definitely grateful for it."

***Dead Club City* is out now.**

Words Jonathan Horsley

"I WANTED TO GO WEIRDER..."

Singer-songwriter **Grace Potter** is putting a new spin on rootsy Americana – with famous friends, oddball gear and a borrowed vintage Martin she wanted to steal...

The drive from Fayston, Vermont, to Topanga Valley, California, spans the breadth of the continental USA and clocks in just shy of 3,000 miles. It'll take around 44 hours behind the wheel, plenty of time to do some thinking. Ask Grace Potter – she's been there, done that.

It's where her new solo studio album, *Mother Road*, first started coming together, not that she knew it at the time as she wrestled a big ol' fold-out Rand McNally Road Atlas, marking the route with a Sharpie. There were no melody lines hummed into an iPhone. Grace had more pressing things on her mind, such as the car itself, a 2020 VW Atlas, that she swears was trying to kill her. "It was a lemon," she says. "The electrics on the inside were f*cking up, making me accelerate randomly. Something had gone wrong in the wiring in that car and I almost died."

She upgraded the Atlas to a 2021 model for the return leg of the journey but all this forward motion – maybe the danger, too – was doing her good. She was putting some distance between her and her problems, getting the head straight. "I genuinely needed it," she recalls. "I desperately needed that road, the amalgamation of heart and soul, and movement and stillness all at once, that I can only achieve all at once when I am out on the road."

There was also a material reason for these epic shuttle runs. She was grabbing gear – guitars, recording consoles, microphones – from her home in Topanga, taking it back to her farm in Vermont. Back on the farm, her husband, the producer Eric Valentine, had the soldering iron running hot, restoring an old 1954 RCA broadcasting console he planned to use on studio sessions. More on that shortly.

As Grace clocked up the miles, she kept her eyes on the road and on the people she would see at diners and truck stops, thinking up stories, seeing herself in different characters. When Valentine was booked to record the new Nickel Creek album *Celebrants*, down in Nashville at RCA Studios, there was an opportunity for Grace to turn these thoughts into songs, to get a band together and track them. Some players she knew well, like the former Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers keys player Benmont Tench and drummer Matt Musty. Others less so, such as Nick Bockrath of Cage The Elephant. Grace had cut his hair once when they were all on tour with Rayland Baxter but had never actually played with him.

"His guitar playing was just so lonely and anxious and perfect," she says. "He really knew the Nashville sound, so if I had to lean on that Nashville sound I knew he could go there. But if I wanted to go weirder, he would be right there beside me. I needed somebody who was a pro I could just throw in, the way Dylan used to do when he was making records. I don't want the band to learn it too good, let's just do it!"

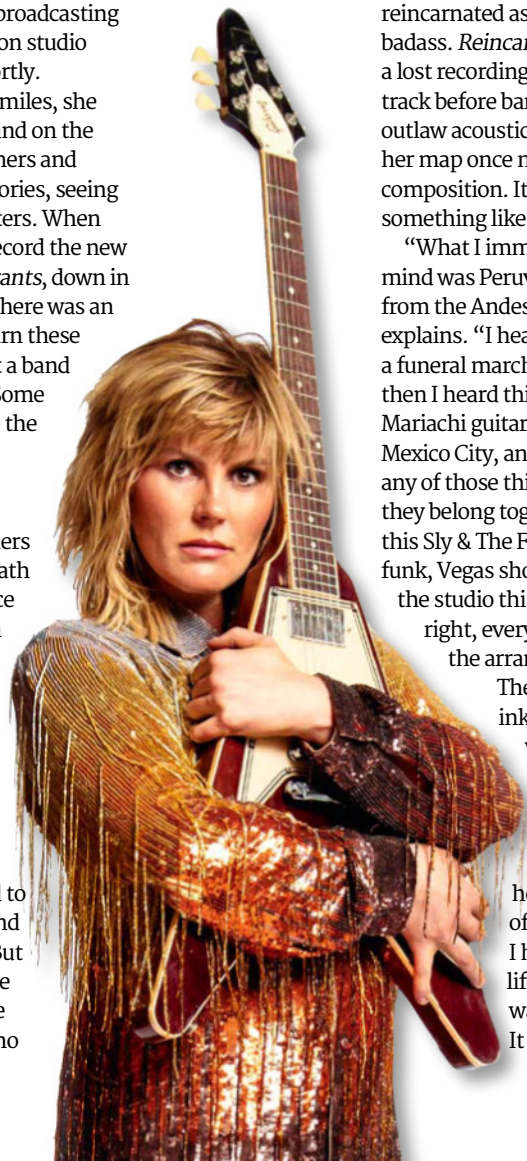
With Tim Deaux (The Whigs/Kings Of Leon) on bass, Dan Kalisher on pedal steel, Valentine joining in, too, Grace got right down to it. It was time to test that RCA console and see what it had. The game plan was to jump in and track live and fix later.

"There are just so many more things about the live band experience. You can always add things but you cannot recreate that energy that was happening in the studio," she says. "Everything you hear, every single lyric – except for two songs where I smashed into the microphone and had to replace a word – was done live. All of the instruments were done live with the exception of timpani and backing vocals."

The songs were made up as she went along, reinventing characters from the road in verse. *Lady Vagabond* was inspired by the story of a child runaway who drowns in the river and is reincarnated as a badass – and it sounds badass. *Reincarnated*, too. It opens like a lost recording of a Morricone scratch track before barrelling into a wild west outlaw acoustic strum. Grace needed her map once more to explain the composition. It went a little something like this...

"What I immediately heard in my mind was Peruvian or Ecuadorian flutes from the Andes mountains," she explains. "I heard the wailing of a funeral march in New Orleans. And then I heard this incredibly driving Mariachi guitar, from a bullfight in Mexico City, and I don't know where any of those things came from, or if they belong together, but I also heard this Sly & The Family Stone, disco-funk, Vegas show tune. I came into the studio this day and said, 'All right, everybody, here is the arrangement!'"

There it was. Laid out in red ink on a map. Dave Cobb, who is custodian of RCA's Studio A, had just the guitar for it, a vintage Martin from the '40s, and he is lucky he still has it. "That is one of my favourite guitars I have ever touched in my life," Grace says. "I really wanted to steal that guitar. It sings. It sings all day."



"WHAT I HEARD IN MY MIND WAS A DRIVING MARIACHI GUITAR FROM A BULLFIGHT IN MEXICO CITY"

The Martin had the sound, but Grace didn't want the B and high E strings ringing out, so they were muted with a piece of foam. "It was like there was a little kid pinching her fingers around it," she says. "I would play and create this *thwack*. It was still this percussive sound but it would be muted so there would be no overtones, no ringing, no pitch. Only the *thwack* of it."

There were other weird off-road items, oddball bits and pieces that made a cool noise and thus made the cut. There was Valentine's old Welson electric guitar that added some throatiness to the soul groove of *Good Time*. There was an old Califone amp loaded with Jensen speakers. It broke more often than not but that was okay. They had others. Most of the time Grace went through a Supro. Bockrath had all kinds of amps laid out before him, though he favoured a Bigsby-equipped Les Paul. That RCA console? They sent Tim Deaux's Fender Bass VI direct, reamping it to use the slap of the reverb tail in the final recording.

"EVERYTHING YOU HEAR – EXCEPT FOR TWO SONGS WHERE I SMASHED INTO THE MICROPHONE – WAS DONE LIVE"

"It was a really edgy approach which Eric didn't know was going to work," Grace says. "When we heard it, especially in the '70s Vegas section of *Lady Vagabond*, it was like, 'Okay, there it is!' The Bass VI is not a "six-string bass." It is a very specific sound, *à la* Jack Nitzsche, that early Duane Eddie *Have 'Twangy' Guitar Will Travel*, Nashville sound. I am such a huge fan of bass guitar as a talking instrument."

A talking instrument? It's as though it were a character. But *Mother Road* is all about character, Potter restlessly exploring their personalities with different sounds, then using these characters as a mechanism for exploring her own, storytelling as therapy. It worked. "Seeing elements of myself in characters, especially parts I don't like, that made me more forgiving of myself," she says.

***Mother Road* is out now**

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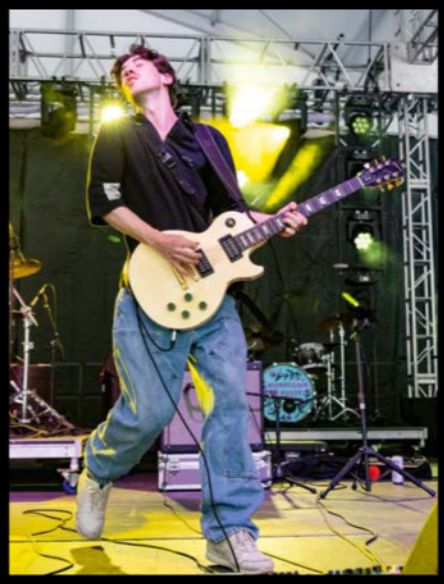
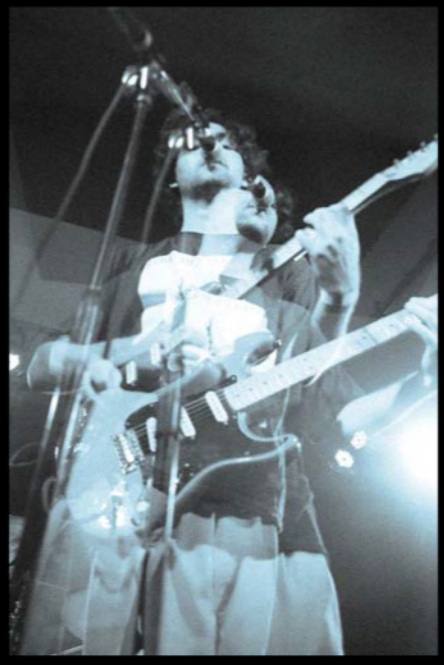
Unite

"WE'RE NOT JUST A STRAIGHT-AHEAD GUITAR BAND"

As the son of a punk rock megastar, Jakob Armstrong was born to play guitar. But in his band Ultra Q, influences range from The Cure to dance music...





Words Ellie Rogers

When your dad is one of the most influential figures in punk rock history, it's unlikely that you're going to grow up aspiring to hold down a normal nine-to-five. But, for Jakob Armstrong – youngest son of Green Day's Billie Joe – the moment of realisation that he was destined to follow the family trade didn't arrive until he'd already sampled a more conventional path.

"I don't think I knew that making music was my vocation until, honestly, I was 18 or 19," says the now 24-year-old Jakob. "I had already graduated high school and I'd been playing with the guys in my band for a long time. I tried going to college, but after about a year I realised that I did not enjoy it. I missed playing music so much."

Fronted by Armstrong, the principal songwriter and rhythm guitarist, Ultra Q also features brothers Enzo and Chris Malaspina, who handle lead guitar and drums respectively, and bassist Kevin Judd. They're a tight-knit bunch with a chemistry that traces all the way back to when Armstrong and the Malaspina brothers met as five- or six-year-old playmates. Around the same time, Green Day were at the height of their second wave of popularity and Jakob had already begun subconsciously "soaking in all of this stuff," although he describes a childhood surrounded by rock stars as being "just normal" to him at the time. "Looking back on it, I can see that it's absolutely a large part of the reason I wanted to play guitar and be in a band," he reflects.

In their teens, Jakob and the Malaspinas began releasing music under the name of Mt. Eddy, with Judd joining the brotherhood later in high school. The brief dalliance with further education only served to crystallise their ambitions. "When we decided to come back together," Jakob recalls, "that's when we were like, okay, we're Ultra Q. We're a band and we want to do this as a career."

At the time of this interview, TG finds the whole band hanging out together, right before the first night of their US tour with indie stalwarts Cloud Nothings and Wavves. It's also the eve of their debut album release, so spirits are understandably high – although the launch of this album, *My Guardian Angel*, actually marks the end of their deal with Royal Mountain Records. "We're kind of just going to roll the dice this summer, see what happens and see where we end up," smiles Jakob, while his bandmates shrug and nod in agreement. "We're trying to tour and play shows," he adds. "That's where our band really thrives. It's honestly also where we have the most fun."

Equipped with a passenger van, enough talent to fill it ten times over and such an enthusiasm for gigging that they've already lost count of how many laps they've taken around the US, Ultra Q relish playing everything from opening spots to headline shows in their home state of California – and it certainly doesn't appear that the elder Armstrong has ever weighed in to expedite the journey from the grassroots up. "The Ultra Q story so far is long and winding with lots of failures," laughs Jakob. "We've failed many times as a band so far, and we're probably going to continue to fail, but it's about the fact we all love to do it so much that we're going to make it work no matter what."

Beyond their youthful zeal, much of the Ultra Q appeal lies in the fact that their sound is ever-shifting in line with fluctuating listening tastes. "We've done three EPs before this record and the first one is very Strokes-inspired with all the angular guitar stuff," explains Jakob. "The second one is pretty much a hardcore EP – very Minor Threat, very Circle Jerks – because that's what we were into when we made it. I think that's something that we lean into as a band. We're good at making whatever we're into right now. There's no rules as far as that stuff goes and, who knows, maybe the next album will be a metal album."

As for *My Guardian Angel*, which was recorded when the band were filling their ears with, in Jakob's words, "synths and dance music, DnB breakbeats and all sorts of shoegaze and dream pop," there's a delirious haze of textures, a mesh of intertwining synth and guitar parts and a collision of upbeat and downbeat forces – as if LCD Soundsystem and The Cure (Jakob's "favourite band of all time") had spawned an illicit musical lovechild. But it's worth mentioning that, while picking and mixing from a candy store of influences, Jakob never tries to sound like his father nor mask any inherent sonic similarities. "It's DNA, I guess,"

Photos Getty

he shrugs. "There was a time when I didn't want to make punk music because my dad makes that type of stuff, but honestly, I don't really care anymore. I'm doing what interests me and what's going to keep me wanting to be in a band. There are absolutely going to be tracks that remind people of that, but it is what it is."

Despite being a guitarist first and foremost, Jakob also refrained from setting any limitations when it came to instrumentation: "If there was something and it was a synth part, that's what it was. We didn't try to make it a guitar part, but blending them together was really the goal."

Assisted by producer Chris Coady, they bridged the gap between jagged riffs and smooth synths with extra textural layers and tonal experiments. As Jakob says: "Chris was using these pedals to go direct – not using amps for some things – and it was really cool to watch him work because I think he noticed that we're not just a straight-ahead guitar band. What he successfully did was find a way to mesh those things really well side by side."

Ever since, the challenge has been to transport studio-born tones to the stage. "Even within the last couple of months, Enzo has turned his pedalboard into a kind of spaceship," laughs Jakob, who's yet to be bitten quite as badly by the gear buying bug, and depends on a Strymon Deco Tape Saturation and an Empress ZOIA modular synth pedal as the basis of his sound. "I have the tape saturation on for the entire show and I use it almost as a master," he says. "Then I use the ZOIA – and I'm not even scratching the surface of what it can really do – for all my different distortion tones. I run that through the Deco with the tape saturation on, and that kind of glues everything together because some of the tones vary a lot."

> "There was a time when I didn't want to make punk music because my dad makes that type of stuff"

IT MIGHT GET LOUDER...

"Maybe the next album will be a metal album," Jakob ponders...

At the heart of the operation is also a Mexican Fender Jazzmaster that Jakob has owned since he was 16, and which he plays in homage to The Cure's Robert Smith circa 1980. "It's the coolest thing and it's never done me wrong," he smiles, explaining that everything goes through a Fender Super-Sonic combo that offers the perfect amount of punch for the "small rooms" the band currently frequents – with the added bonus being that its compact size makes for easy van loading. "I like to have it be as simple as possible and use as little stuff as possible," he says, although he does confess to lusting after "one of those walls of Marshalls" for future outings.

"I don't know if it would work with the music we play," he says, "but it would be a dream." And – who knows – perhaps the opportunity will arise if album two does take that heavy metal turn.

***My Guardian Angel* is out now**

WELCOME TO THE SLINKY FAMILY

ERNIE BALL®

SINCE 1962

Words Jonathan Horsley

"WE LOVE THE INTENSITY AND THE AGGRESSION!"

The new album from rising stars **Saint Agnes** is an all-out sonic attack – created by two guitarists with an unorthodox approach to tone

There are some occasions in life when doing the wrong thing can be exactly the right thing to do, and making a rock record is one of them. The art of engineering and producing is something that can be taught in a classroom, but learning when to bend the rules, when to break them, and when to throw orthodoxy on the bonfire comes from instinct. It comes from knowing the material.

The songs that Saint Agnes' vocalist/guitarist Kitty A. Austen and guitarist Jon James Tufnell had put together for *Bloodsuckers*, their major label debut for Spinefarm and follow-up to 2019 debut *Welcome To Silvertown*, told them all they needed to know. This was a record made during difficult times. Kitty's mother had died in the months before they went to work. This was never going to be finessed onto the tape, quantised, manicured. It was to be a bonfire of the rulebook, ugly and confrontational, and they knew this from the get-go.

"We're producing even before the song is written," Kitty says "I'll have a concept in mind, a vision of the song, and that will include things like, 'I want a guitar that sounds like this band, or this bit in a specific song.' We never, ever sit down with an acoustic guitar and work out chords and melody. It is always the whole thing, complete in my head as we go."

What Saint Agnes had in mind was raw nerves, feedback, nasty fuzz, chaos. When the pair speak to TG, Jon doesn't need to be wearing a Nine Inch Nails t-shirt to reveal the Trent Reznor influence. You could add Rage Against The Machine in there, too, for the off-road guitar sounds and quiet/loud dynamic. *Bloodsuckers* is every inch the studio record but has a live feel, leaning hard on drummer Andy Head's ability to come down hard with big, clean hits. "You can really crank the overheads and get the excitement from the snare," Jon says.

You could also run another track of drums and put it through a ZVex Fuzz Factory as Jon did to add some weird textures to *Animal*. There are moments when you are not quite sure if Kitty is even going to make it to the next track, that any moment now she's gonna smash the mic and storm off – she has an affection for the word 'motherf*cker' to rival Samuel L. Jackson. All of it sounds in the red.

"We are much more interested in the emotion of it instead of making sure it is absolutely on the grid," Kitty says. "There might be some wrong notes on there and we might well keep them because we love the intensity and the aggression of the performance."

If any more intensity was required, Kitty and Jon would engineer it, twisting electric guitars or vocals into sounds that might otherwise be synthesized. *This Is Not The End* needed the treatment. Jon took Kitty's vocals and tricked the computer

2-PLAYER GAMES
"Kitty and I are the creative driving force of the band," Jon says.

"THE WAY KITTY PLAYS IS JUST INSANELY HARD"
JON JAMES TUFNELL

into glitching them. If the band were a little spooked going into this record, knowing how important it would be, Sean Beavan's counsel and production nous put them on ease. Hired for his long association with Trent Reznor and Nine Inch Nails, Beavan worked with Saint Agnes on *Follow You*, giving them a mix but more importantly the confidence they needed to trust their instincts and take the record wherever they wanted it to go. That was the first song in the can, and it established the precedent that, sure, Kitty could just track vocals using the same industry-standard Shure SM58 she uses onstage. Why not? Like any good producer worth their salt, when they like what they're hearing they stay out of the way.

As Kitty recalls it: "He said, 'I am not in the business of making Sean Beavan records. I want to make the most Nine Inch Nails records that I can make. I want to make the most Saint Agnes record I can make.' That was music to our ears."

With *Follow You* on file they moved straight onto *Middle Finger*, opening it with a really screwed up piece of noise, played on bass guitar. That was another source of stress; who would play bass? Ben Chernett had left the band right before the sessions began. Kitty and Jon took turns. On *Middle Finger*, we are hearing Kitty playing bass while Jon manipulates a DigiTech Whammy. Chernett's departure was disruptive but it afforded Kitty and Jon a sense of clarity and freedom to cut loose.

"Kitty and I are the creative driving force of the band and it just meant that there was one fewer person to negotiate with, to take into account," Jon says. "And so this record, being so incredibly personal for Kitty, it was totally unfiltered. Kitty was in a really tough place, and might spend three days just not in a mental state to really work on it. So when she was like, 'Actually, let's go play guitar.' I'd be like, 'F*ck yeah, let's go!'"

Ryan Brown has since been hired on bass guitar. Now they've just got to work out how to recreate these sounds live. Oftentimes, a band will find a rhythm guitar sound and build an album around it. In Saint Agnes, the guitar tone evolves across the record. It is to fit the song, they say, and yet, how this record was made, with Kitty and Jon passing each other the guitar, shouting out the plays to one another, and making it up as they went along, it's as though the rhythm guitar tone was evolving over the course of the record, drawing influence from what had immediately came before.

Jon used a few models; a Silvertone Jupiter with silver-foils, an Epiphone Dot with Bare Knuckle P-90s, and there was an Ibanez Iceman with a DiMarzio Super Distortion at the bridge and an RG370 S-style for divebomb stunt guitar. A laundry list of stompboxes were used. There were some constants, like Kitty's 1960s Hofner Galaxie that she used throughout. With its original staple pickups, it is a regular scale guitar that sounds like a baritone. "The chunk on it is unbelievable," she says. "I love it. I love that guitar. And I have had to stop playing it because it's getting more and more f*cked."

Another signature sound was DI'd guitar through a vintage Zoom UF-01 Ultra Fuzz. We say 'vintage', but the Ultra Fuzz dropped in 2001, already looking like it belonged to another era, to another industry. Some players found it difficult, arcane. Jon finds it essential. "I have two, and I bought one for £19, like, 15 years ago, and the other one I bought for £140 in case the other one died, but they are f*cking solid," he says. "It's crazy. With heavy guitar, we pretty much always set up a DI of one of those two pedals, and then we will decide if that's enough on its own, and if its not we will bring in an amp sound which is normally going to be one of our Laneys, because we are endorsed by them. We use the Ironheart."

The STL AmpHub plugin suite came in handy, as did Austen's Peavey Classic 30 1x12 combo, which also found its way on record. If the Saint Agnes aesthetic is to favour the face-ripping intensity that comes from the DI-through-fuzz-distortion approach, they know not to push it too far. "We love the sound of DI guitars," Jon says. "I love Nine Inch Nails. I love industrial music. Kitty is the same. We love the immediacy and brightness of that, and how close it sounds to your ears. But it's also incredibly fatiguing to listen to, so we try to use it as often as we can but mixed in with real amp sounds."

Where Saint Agnes differ from most bands who track their guitars direct to the desk is that they have the sound baked in. Jon will have his through an Ultra Fuzz, Kitty through a Boss Metal Zone. Technology can offer a safety net when recording. Not here. "We don't make our lives easier with it," Jon says. "It is a tool to be abused."

So, too, is the gear. We all get precious about it, but you'll hear cheapo Behringer distortions on *Bloodsuckers*. The P-Bass was a Squier. They are all tools to be abused. Everything is. That sound in your head? It doesn't matter how you get it.

"We see each other's ability as tools to use," Jon says. "If there is something that needs more lead playing, that's always going to be me. If there is something that needs a riff, but it just doesn't have enough jagged character to it, Kitty will play it. The way Kitty plays is just incredibly aggressive, just insanely hard. I can't replicate the same feel. There is something really grungy and punky about the way Kitty plays, and it just works. We are not precious at all…"

***Bloodsuckers* is out now.**

"WE NEVER, EVER SIT DOWN WITH AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR AND WORK OUT CHORDS AND MELODY"
KITTY A. AUSTEN

Photo Olly Curtis

99 WAYS TO BETTER TONE

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BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TONE

Get the basics of your rig sorted with these fundamental tone-shaping tips

01 EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT STRINGS

The material your strings are made of fundamentally affects your guitar tone. Of course, electric guitars require metal strings in order for the magnetic pickups to work, however, string manufacturers offer a range of alloys, each with different tonal properties. Plain steel and nickel-wound steel are most common for unwound/wound strings respectively. Rotosound's Ultramags are a 'highly magnetic' string which they say gives more power and sustain. Ernie Ball's Cobalt series 'maximises output and clarity'. You can judge their claims for yourself, but our experience is that materials do matter!

02 GET PLUCKY!

Not all picks are equal, and yes, they certainly can affect your tone. Eric Johnson and John Petrucci have each made use of Dunlop Jazz IIIs, both tweaking the shape of the point and edges for a smoother glide across the strings. The Edge uses Herdim Blue picks, plucking the strings with the textured end for a brighter, er, edge to his sound. Famously, Brian May uses an Old English Sixpence for his trademark tones. More fundamentally, the thickness of your pick can affect tone. Thin picks have a lovely gentle sound for strumming, for example.

03 SET YOUR AMP LEVELS

Your main aim is to set your amp so that it's always at a suitable level and has the desired tone when your guitar and any effects are plugged in. Here are some basics:

- **Begin with the master volume knob set between zero and two, so you can hear yourself without blowing your ears off.**
- **Keep all tone controls at their midway points, not zero, so you can make tone cuts or boosts as required.**
- **If using a multi-channel amp, check each channel is roughly the same volume – it's not always obvious from the position of the knobs, so listen carefully!**
- **A gain control will add distortion, but it's dependent on the level of your guitar output, so make sure your instrument's volume is maxed out while you get set up.**
- **If you run your amp (especially a valve amp) loud, eg, at a gig, you will usually need less gain than you did in your living room. With your core tone set, practise with higher volumes.**

04 PEDALS: AIM FOR UNITY

We'll look at individual effects later on, but, as regards the very basics, just like your amp, you need to check the levels of your effect pedals. Play each pedal one by one, with all the others switched to bypass/off. Unless you're dialling in a volume boost (eg, for a bit of a kick during a solo), your best starting point is to be at 'unity gain' – which simply means the volume stays the same, with or without the pedal engaged. When you know your amp and pedals are at unity gain, it's easier to make changes to the levels where you really need them. Low output? Check your power supply. Failing batteries and mismatched 'wall-wart' power supplies can make your pedals act up.

TAKE THE LEAD
Choose premium cables for better tone and a reliable rig

05 GO PREMIUM WITH CABLES

Budget cables are usually a false economy. Though not always the case, cheap leads are generally more susceptible to picking up microphonic noise and are more likely to fail under the rigours of general use. A small upgrade in price to a premium cable (which often includes a substantial warranty) is worth the extra outlay. Brands such as Mogami, D'Addario, Planet Waves, Ernie Ball, Fender and many more will see you right. You'll need an 'instrument' T/S jack to jack cable in most cases. Opt for the shortest cables you can. Tone-sapping capacitance increases with longer cable runs. Gold-plated plugs offer minimal sonic improvements but won't corrode, ensuring the best signal flow.

Words Chris Bird

TONE TIPS
JARGON BUSTER

Get the lowdown on the most important terms in all things tone related

Amp channel
An amplifier increases a guitar's electrical signal in order to reproduce the sound through a connected speaker. Many amplifiers are equipped with separate audio signal paths (aka channels), usually voiced differently to produce a clean sound on one and a more distorted sound on the other.

British amp sound
A catch-all term referring originally to the tones of British amp brands from the 1960s and '70s such as Marshall and Vox. The former is renowned for the overdriven, saturated tones of the JTM and JCM series. Vox's AC30 is noted for a cleaner, chimier sound as heard on music by The Beatles and The Shadows.

Delay
An effect that plays back an audio signal after a period of time. Typically the pause ranges from a few milliseconds to one or two seconds. Most units allow for control of the number of times the signal is repeated and the level of said repeats.

Digital modelling
A process employing software to emulate the sound of other equipment, typically classic amplifiers and effects. Early examples include the Line 6 AxSys 212 modelling amp, the Line 6 POD multi-effect, and the Roland VG-8 virtual guitar system. A later innovation is Kemper's profiling technology, which allows users to capture digital emulations of their own equipment.

Distortion
A form of 'hard clipping' signal processing produced, in general, by increasing gain. Various forms of distortion are employed, including overdrive for valve amplifiers or bespoke fuzz or boost units.

Effect loop
This is a break in the signal chain between an amplifier's preamp and power amp stages, allowing the user to insert audio effects. Subjectively, certain effects are said to sound better when connected within an effect loop as opposed to being placed before an amplifier's main input.

Filter effect
Low- and high-pass 'filters' allow low- and high-end frequencies respectively to be heard, while a band-pass filter works within a predetermined frequency range and cuts low- and high-end frequencies on either side. Wah is a manually controlled form of the effect. Other units use pre-set frequencies and timings.

Fuzz
A form of distorted signal processing. Notable units include the Dunlop Fuzz Face, the EHX Big Muff and the ZVex Fuzz Factory.

Gain
An amplifier's gain refers to how much it boosts the strength of the signal passing through its preamp. Typically, gain introduces a desirable form of distortion into the signal, increasing compression and sustain.

Humbucker
This is a magnetic transducer that uses two wire coils to convert the vibration of metal strings into an electrical signal, which is subsequently routed to an amplifier. The two coils are employed in order to cancel out hum inherent in single-coil pickup designs.

Intonation
This is the fine tuning of guitar strings along the length of the fretboard. Typically, adjustments are made on a guitar's bridge saddles.

Modulation effect
A category of effect encompassing tremolo, phaser, chorus, flanger, vibrato and ring modulation.

Multi-effect
These are equipped with many commonly used guitar effects, with some flagship units including extensive ranges of digitally modelled classic desirable stomp boxes and studio effects, alongside amplifier, microphone, speaker and cabinet models.

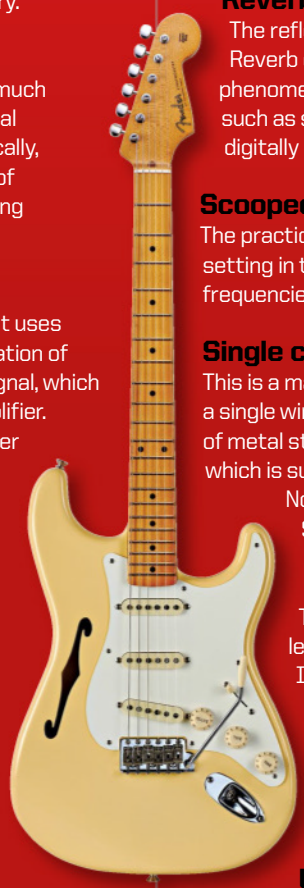
Overdrive
This form of distortion boosts the guitar's gain with the aim of driving a valve amp into clipping. Where, in general, distortion and fuzz pedals use harsh-sounding 'hard clipping', overdrive employs soft clipping for a smoother sound.

Pitch shifter
This raises or lowers the pitch of an audio signal. Most units offer pre-set pitch changes and harmonising abilities. DigiTech's Whammy utilises a treadle for dynamic pitch shifting.

Reverb
The reflection of sound in a space. Reverb effects are recreations of this phenomenon using various technologies such as spring reverb, plate reverb and digitally modelled reverb.

Scooped tone
The practice of lowering the midrange setting in the EQ. Bass and treble frequencies remain at medium/high settings.

Single coil pickup
This is a magnetic transducer that employs a single wire coil to convert the vibration of metal strings into an electrical signal, which is subsequently routed to an amplifier. Notably seen on the Fender Standard Stratocaster.



Unity gain
The idea that an output signal's level is equal to its input level. In practical terms, this might refer to ensuring an effect pedal doesn't significantly alter volume when switched on compared to when it is bypassed.

US amp sound
A catch-all term referring originally to the tones of US amp brands as far back as the 1950s, notably Fender, and then in the '70s and '80s with Mesa/Boogie. Early Fenders are renowned for wide dynamic range and clean headroom. Mesa/Boogie became associated with high gain tones, notably used by Metallica's James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett.

Words Chris Bird **Photos** Rob Monk / Paul Rodgers

TONE TIPS

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PICKUPS

Today, it's harder than ever to describe the sonic characteristics of pickup types – there are so many configurations, both stock and after-market, that blur the lines of each core design. For every classic single coil there's a stacked noiseless unit; for every vintage-voiced humbucker there's a high-output facemelter for metal. However, there are a few key categories of pickup to know about. A little knowledge of each one's origins and uses will help you identify your own tonal requirements should you wish to swap out your axe's pups.

SINGLE COILS

Early designs appeared in Rickenbacker lap steels, Gibson and Gretsch semis, and then later in Fender's Telecaster predecessor, the Esquire, but perhaps the archetypal single-coil pickup is that found in the Fender Stratocaster. The Strat's later five-way (originally three-way) switching design has become integral to common perception of what this type of pickup should sound like, and guitarists as varied as Jimi Hendrix and Cory Wong have made the sounds of these pickups their own. HSS/HSH-style Superstrats are arguably only simple variations on the original theme.

HUMBUCKERS

Humbuckers solve the problem of noise inherent in passive single coil designs. Two coils are employed in a "reverse-wound reverse-polarity" configuration that cancels out the hum. 20 or so years after the first humbuckers appeared, Gibson released its PAF unit in the 1950s, setting a much copied template for passive 'bucker design that remains essentially the same to this day. Typically, humbuckers sound fatter, bassier and have less treble than single coils. The Les Paul tones of Jimmy Page and Slash wouldn't be the same without 'em.

P-90S

Designed by Gibson's Walt Fuller in the 1940s, the P-90 is sonically distinct from other single-coil designs by virtue of a (ahem!) fuller-bodied sound that falls somewhere between the fatness of humbuckers and treble-rich presentation of Fender-style single coils. They're most famously deployed on the Les Paul Jr (though also commonly on LP Standards and SGs), as used by Bob Marley, Leslie West and Billie Joe Armstrong, amongst countless others.

ACTIVE PICKUPS

Active (ie, battery-powered) pickup systems gained popularity in the '80s, notably among many metal acts, but also in the hands of David Gilmour and Mark Knopfler, who, let's face it, are no strangers to quality tone. The active circuitry gives higher output levels than passive units and ensures both single coils and humbuckers alike deliver next to no audible noise. Typically these systems would have a 'hi-fi' style tight, crisp top end befitting of '80s high production value music.

FLUENCE PICKUPS

A later active innovation developed by Fishman, here the electronic gubbins is printed onto a 'Fluence Core' circuit board instead of being wound around a bobbin. The high-performance, low-noise units offer some of the 'organic' experience of passive pickups, plus the power, low-end clarity and low noise that only actives can give. Oft-used on seven-, eight- and even nine-string guitars, the units are well-suited to 'modern' styles. However, clearly not wishing to pigeonhole their tech, Fishman have also created Fluence versions of classic-voiced humbuckers, single coils and P-90s.

GUITARISTS AS LEADERS Tosin Abasi is no stranger to Fluence pickups

Words Stuart Williams **Photo** Neil Godwin

TONE TIPS

GUITAR MODS AND FIXES

Great tone starts at the source. Get your guitar working right first and you'll have a solid foundation to build on

06 CONSIDER GETTING A SETUP

A guitar setup from an experienced luthier is the quickest way to get your guitar back into shape. If you've changed string gauge from the original size, there's every chance your guitar's nut, neck relief, string height and intonation will need adjusting too. Some (or all) of this work can be carried out yourself, however if you've never done it before then paying a professional to give your pride and joy a once-over is well worth it.

07 INTONATE

You wouldn't expect your guitar to sound great without tuning it, but just because the open strings are in tune, doesn't mean that the guitar is accurately pitched throughout the length of the fretboard. That's where intonation adjustment at the bridge comes in, and it's achieved by moving the saddles backwards or forwards to raise or lower the string's pitch with the saddle adjustment screws. You can spot these as they are encased inside a spring. It's a straightforward and zero-cost job which requires a screwdriver, guitar tuner and a little bit of patience. Here's what to do:

GET IN TUNE

To start, get all of your open strings to pitch at the tuning you're going to be using the guitar in most often. You're going to be making adjustments to the guitar so use a tuner to ensure that you're as accurate as possible.

HARMONICS VS FRETTED NOTES

With your tuner still connected, play a harmonic on the lowest string at the 12th fret. Make sure it's played cleanly to give yourself an accurate reading. Next, fret the same string at the 12th fret and compare the pitches of the harmonic and fretted note.

SADDLE-UP!

Your next step depends on the variance between the harmonic and fretted notes. If there is none, move on to the next string and repeat the same steps. If the fretted note is flat, you need to move the saddle towards the headstock. If the fretted note is sharp, it needs to move towards the bridge. Once the notes match, repeat the process for each string and you're done!

08 TONE MAGNET

There's every chance you've considered swapping your guitar's pickups at some point, but have you ever considered adjusting your pickup height? This free fix takes no time at all, and might just change your mind about your magnets. Changing your pickup height also allows you to create an even transition between the pickup positions, or make certain pickups (ie, the bridge position) louder for a perceived boost when selected.

If your tone is too thin and lacking detail, try raising them up for more power and clarity. Conversely, if your guitar is lacking sustain it could be that the pickup is too close and restricting the string's vibration with 'string pull' (particularly in the neck position).

Another sign that your pickups are too high are the dreaded 'wolf notes': unwanted and often dissonant harmonics. Experiment with pickup height by tightening the surrounding screws to raise them, or loosening them to lower them.

If you're adjusting the pole pieces on a humbucker or P-90, make small adjustments and set them to the same curved profile as your strings.

09 CHECK YOUR TUNERS

Keeping your guitar in tune starts, unsurprisingly with the tuners. If you have a budget guitar then you may want to think about upgrading. High-ratio, locking tuners from the likes of Grover, Schaller, Gotoh allow for finer tuning and speedy string changes due to the firm locking mechanism – particularly handy if your guitar has a vibrato. As well as this, they'll hold your tuning with greater stability as there are no string windings.

If you're sticking with your current models, check the fastening screws and nuts next time you change strings. With your tuners attached securely you'll give yourself the best chance at solid tuning, regardless of the brand or type.

10 ELECTRONICS
POT LUCK

The resistance value of your guitar pots – along with the capacitors on your tone control(s) – also contributes to your overall tone. As a general rule, guitars fitted with brighter pickups (such as single coils) tend to use lower resistance, 250k pots. This filters out and tames some of the high end, while humbucker-equipped guitars often use a higher resistance value (500k) so as not to become too muddy. You can experiment with this by using a different pot value in order to allow more or less high end through.

11 ELECTRONICS
DOWN TO EARTH

Every component on your guitar is earthed via a connection to the back of your control pots. If you're experiencing electronic buzzing *until* you touch the metal parts of your guitar, it's likely you have an earthing issue. So, it's worth checking that there are no loose wires inside the control cavity, and don't forget that your bridge should also be connected to ground.

12 ELECTRONICS
SPINNING POTS

Ever turned your controls to their minimum or maximum setting and had them continue to move? That's a loose pot, friend, and if left unaddressed, it'll most likely sever the wire connection. The good news is, it's easy to fix with a simple spanner. Pull the plastic knob off your guitar and position the pot correctly, then tighten the nuts up to hold it securely in place. Set the control to min or max, put the control knob back on in the correct position and you'll be back to stability.

13 ELECTRONICS
SECURE SOCKET

Much like your pots, a jack socket that isn't secure will eventually break, but worse than that it can cause all kinds of unwanted popping and crackling before it does. Tighten up your jack socket nut and you'll keep it firmly in place. Ideally you'll remove the scratchplate or jack socket plate to do this, but for a quick fix, try plugging a cable in and use it to gently pull the socket up. This will give you the maximum amount of thread to tighten the nut onto.

14 ELECTRONICS
KEEP IT CLEAN

Dust inside your pots and switches can result in scratching and popping when you operate them. Before you look to replace these parts, try some contact cleaner. You'll need to access the components via the control cavities in your guitar and apply the cleaner to the moving parts of the contacts. For pots, that means the hole in the metal casing. Spray it, move it and hopefully you'll have a smooth signal.

FX TONE GUIDE

GET MORE FROM YOUR DRIVE PEDALS

15 TUBE AMP SATURATION USING A BOOST

This is the oldest tone trick in the book. Tube amps sound best when they're being pushed. Using a gain pedal in front of an amp results in additional breakup and compression. This works best with smaller tube amps, as they run out of headroom quicker, and trip into power tube saturation. For higher-wattage amps, add some preamp gain at the amp, too.

16 DON'T USE TOO MUCH GAIN

Most of the time, distortion and overdrive pedals don't sound great when maxed out. Start at a low setting, and gradually raise the gain until you're happy with the sound. Even for metal, most bands are using less gain than you think. As discussed above, into a tube amp, the level control is the one you want to push as high as possible to thicken your sound.

17 DJENT WITH A TUBE SCREAMER

Overdrive pedals add compression of their own, as well as a distinct EQ profile – and the Ibanez Tube Screamer, with its mid hump, is excellent placed in front of a high-gain amp. With a valve amp on its drive channel, turn the Screamer's gain down low, then bring up the level until it djents. Many other companies have Tube Screamer type pedals in their catalogues. Try it at the limit of its range to figure out its operation, before pulling it back to a place that works for you.

18 DON'T OVERLOAD THE LEVEL

So far we've only discussed tube amplifiers, but what if you're going into a solid state piece of kit, or an audio interface? Simple – you don't want to push the level, as that will result in audio clipping of the kind you don't want. Instead, always push the level up to the point where clipping occurs – usually the red light on an interface, then back off the input trim slightly. This will give you the thickest sound.

19 DECIDE IF YOU ACTUALLY NEED A FUZZ

For players that remember '90s albums like Smashing Pumpkins' *Siamese Dream*, fuzz is the thickest distortion tone. Right? Well, even a lot of fuzz-obsessed bands – including SP – recorded using other gain devices in studio. For extreme saturation, RAT-style distortions and flatter-EQ pedals often record better. Open the gain right up, and it can sound pretty close to a fuzz once recorded.

20 LEARN HOW PEDALS' TONE CONTROLS AFFECT YOUR SOUND

Most gain pedals have a tone pot, but there are many different types. Some are tilt, some are low-pass filters, and some pedals have more than one. If the pedal has a single tone pot, make sure you're not making assumptions.

21 LEARN ABOUT HOW YOUR GAIN STAGES INTERACT

The trick to thick, rich guitar tone is higher-order harmonics. These are most easily added with gain stages. Ever notice why a distorted signal sounds louder and punchier? This is why. Even low-gain amplifier stages will add additional harmonic content and richness. Managing your gain stages – boosts, overdrives, distortions, fuzzes and amplifiers – is the key to great tone.

22 CONSIDER USING A BUFFER

The true bypass revolution that came along with boutique pedals was a necessary correction in some ways. Before that, most pedals were buffered, and long chains of buffered pedals could have an adverse effect on tone. However, to manage impedance mismatch between different pedals, a buffer is still very useful. So if your signal chain is a little weak sounding, or dark, then consider adding a buffered pedal or dedicated buffer to the start of your chain.

23 FLATTEN THE EQ PROFILE OF SCOOPED-EQ PEDALS

The Big Muff sounds as massive as it does in isolation because of its pronounced mid scoop. However, in a band or recording context sometimes this isn't what you want. Luckily it's easy to solve – pair it with another gain stage for solos or rhythm work. Classic options include an MXR Distortion+ for solos, and an Ibanez Tube Screamer for rhythm. The latter adds additional compression, and flattens out the EQ profile.

FUZZY RAT A ProCo Rat can work as distortion or fuzz

24 TRY A WET-WET DRIVE SETUP

If you're running a stereo setup, or two heads into a stereo cab, you can try running two different drive paths. Normally, you'd probably have the same gain stages set to run into both amps, and only split at stereo time effects. However, splitting earlier – if your rig has a full stereo path – means you can have two more distinct 'voices'. This is ideal for thickening your tone if you're a lone guitarist.

25 CUT BASS WHEN USING HIGHER GAIN

If you're palm-muting or playing with an extended-range guitar, pay close attention to the bass EQ on gain pedals. Generally speaking, the more bass in your guitar signal, the more careful you need to be about higher-gain settings. Mud and rumble builds up at the bottom-end fast. If you're unsure, as the gain control goes up, cut the bass. This reduction and tightening actually makes the bottom end sound more focused.

26 STACK GAIN STAGES

Heard of gain stacking? Put simply, this means using more than one drive stage – and that could be a couple of drive/distortion pedals, plus your amp's own gain. The question is: how much stacking of pedals is too much? Well, if less is more, then imagine how much more 'more' will be! The answer is to try stacking every gain stage you own, in different orders to see which combination of gain stages and EQ profiles work best. When stacking, generally you want lower gain pedals first, with level controls used to trim.

27 REMEMBER! CYMBALS EAT GUITARS

If you're having trouble punching through a mix, either live or while recording, remember this: certain frequency ranges get very busy and your guitar won't punch through – especially if there's lots of treble content. Instead, EQ your guitar around these to find space, and cut the 'muddier' bands. This is where combining a preamp and EQ pedal with your gain stages can really make the difference.

28 TONE TRIAGE

If something sounds off and the culprit isn't obvious, try systematically taking pedals out of the chain one by one to make a diagnosis. In the worst case, plug directly into the amp. Everybody with a larger 'board at some point has had to do this, tearing their hair out, before finding that one faulty patch cable, drained battery or rolled off knob. As you do this, check the tone controls on each gain pedal, as this is another common pitfall.

29 USE A COMPRESSOR

Compression is a type of dynamic amplification that evens out the levels in your signal. You can think of it as making the loud bits quieter, and the quiet bits louder. As a result, it's great for times when your guitar needs to punch right through, regardless of input dynamics. Examples would be solos and tapping phrases, especially clean ones.

30 USE AN ISOLATED POWER SUPPLY

If you're getting audio line noise then one of the most likely culprits is a pedal without power line filtering. Once you've eliminated your drive pedals as the source, then the next likely suspect is your power supply. Isolated power supplies are a boring purchase, yes, but they're one of the biggest things you can do to improve your tone, especially if your rig does suffer noise problems.

31 CHECK WHETHER GAIN STAGES ARE OUT OF PHASE

Amplification stages have an inverting or non-inverting topology, which means they either invert the phase of the input signal, or leave it as-is. This means that in certain situations using some combinations of gain pedals can result in a thin, out-of-phase sound. This can happen live, or when double-tracking with particular pedals in the studio. Change the pedal or flip the phase of the mixer channel to hear the sound thicken up immediately.

32 TRY AN ALWAYS-ON BOOST

We've talked about how important adding additional amp stages and gain is. So why go without it? Many players buy a boost or preamp pedal and simply leave it on all the time. In the case of classic tape echoes like the Echoplex and Roland Space Echo, some guitarists kept units in their signal chain even after the tape itself had broken – like Nick Zinner from Yeah Yeah Yeahs. Spare yourself the hassle of lugging around a vintage tape machine and get a pedal recreation, and leave it on to thicken your tone.

33 USE AN EQ PEDAL AS A GAIN STAGE

Both flavours of active EQ pedal that you normally encounter, graphic and parametric, are also a gain stage. Use an EQ after your drives to passively cut problem bands, or put it early in your chain as an additional stacked amplifier stage. It can be used to boost specific bands for punchier voicing, and will thicken your tone.

EQ OR BUST
Get more drive with a simple EQ pedal

GET MORE FROM YOUR MODULATIONS AND FILTER EFFECTS

34 USE STEREO CHORUS

Stereo chorus is a great way of thickening up guitar parts, and will work even when at subtle settings. Set the rate at the lowest possible setting and then experiment with the depth or wet-dry control. Depending on the type of chorus, it can be very subtle, giving almost the feel of a double-tracked guitar.

35 TRY A COCKED WAH

Cocked wah is one of the most fun effects to use, though it's easier in the studio than live. Even the most basic settings – fully open, and fully closed – can be very impactful for breakdowns and pre-choruses. For more complex riffs you can go full Mark Knopfler and find a place to 'park' the pedal for a *Money For Nothing* kind of sound.

36 EXPERIMENT WITH THE DEPTH CONTROL

Modulation effects are great for adding gentle movement to all sorts of guitar parts, from clean picked passages to solos. Even so, the far end of the depth control is an area feared by many guitarists – but try experimenting, we say! Simply max out the depth on your pedal, then see if you can find a use for the sound. After all, it worked for Eddie Van Halen.

37 FUZZ INTO WAH

Wah pedals are normally a variable bandpass filter, and as such the more harmonic content they have to chew on, the better. Since gain stages add additional harmonic content, this means that pairings like fuzz into wah are particularly impactful. Even so, it's also true that the inverse can yield interesting results too, with an overdrive boosting an already-filtered signal. Generally, higher gain in front, and lower gain after is the way to go.

38 FREEBIE UNI-VIBE USING A PHASER

If you own a phaser, depending on the voicing you probably also have a passable fixed Uni-Vibe emulation at your disposal. Simply stick a mid-gain pedal in front, then turn the rate and depth right up to get your wobble on.

39 HIT IT HARDER

Almost all modulation pedals benefit from gain stages in front, since many involve some kind of filtering. Top of the list are wah and phase effects, but flangers also sound ace when smashed. Unless you have these pedals in your amp's effect loop, this is another reason to own a couple of decent gain stages even if you primarily rely on amp gain.

40 MANUAL FILTER

A wah is a bandpass filter, so by moving your foot from open to closed or vice versa over the duration of a phrase or riff you can create a dynamic filter sweep. Since you have full control, this can work even for very long riffs, or a whole section like a pre-chorus or intro. A version of this – albeit with a quick sweep – can be heard applied to a pick scrape on the Rage Against The Machine track *Testify*.

41 IMPOSE ORDER ON YOUR 'BOARD

There's no such thing as correct pedal order. In fact, one of the easiest, and most inspirational things you can do is to regularly change up the order of your 'board. Even so, there are some rules of thumb that tend to hold. If you're not happy about the sound of your 'board, then it's sometimes worth resetting and then going from there. In the case of modulation pedals, that's simple – stick them at the end, where the signal is the most complex.

GET MORE FROM YOUR DELAYS AND REVERBS

42 SINGLE-SHOT STUDIO REVERSE

To mimic the '70s-style effect of reversing your guitar sound in the studio, you can use this trick. Set a delay to reverse mode, then turn feedback down to a single repeat and the level up to max (or unity with the dry signal). Live, the gap between playing and repeat shouldn't be an issue. When recording, simply play to a click with the monitoring off, then drag the waveform back to the start of the passage. If you played to the click, it should be in time, apart from the initial offset caused by the buffer size.

43 VERB INTO DRIVE

There are few things as rock 'n' roll as running a reverb into a drive, distortion or fuzz. Conventional wisdom says to order these effects the other way around, but for runaway train washes of distorted reverb, this is far more attention-grabbing! For bonus points use a reverb that has an infinite or swell mode for pure noise bliss.

44 PARALLEL DELAYS

Instead of using reverb, get more defined but disorientating ambience by running two mono channels of delay panned right and left. Set the times differently, and listen to the repeats as they converge and diverge in complex patterns. Some psychedelic and shoegaze guitarists used this trick for space cadet guitar sounds.

TAKE ME TO CHURCH
Get cavernous sounds with a dedicated stereo reverb

45 LOWER THE TREBLE ON TAILS AND REPEATS

Reverb tails can quickly swamp your dry signal. Especially at longer decay or dwell settings, managing the tone of reverb tails is key. Beyond short slapback and room effects, as reverb time goes up, tails need to have their treble rolled off, similar to how high frequency content would be dampened in real spaces. This can also apply to delay tails, and it's why BBD or analogue delays gel into a band mix so well.

46 MAX THOSE CONTROLS!

There's a lot of crossover between digital buffered time effects like delay, reverb, loopers and pitch shifters. Try maxing out the controls in odd combinations, to unlock oddities such as fake harmonisation, oscillation, machine-gun repeats and more. Take the classic intro to Bloc Party's debut album *Silent Alarm*, for example. Its eerily drifting digital repeats are caused by dimed feedback and level controls.

47 POST-ROCK TREMOLO PICKING

Countless post-rock acts have used tremolo picking to create a wash of noise. Choose a delay and set it to a moderate length, with the effect level rolled back slightly, then tremolo pick to create a cascading shower of notes. As you change frets, the repeats will blend single-note lines into a complex pad. Using a reverse delay will mean there's a slight lag between dry and wet, ideal for phrases with faster note changes.

48 EXPERIMENT WITH AUTO-OSCILLATION

What happens when you turn delay feedback to max? Auto-oscillation, where the delays run away, increasing in pitch and creating a drone that can be tuned to a note. Think the end of Radiohead's *Karma Police* (although that was a tape echo). This is mostly only available on analogue delays, but some digital delays will oscillate, or even do stranger things, like create glitchy loops.

49 REMEMBER THE DIFFERENT TIMBRES OF DELAY TYPES

If you're using a digital delay and the repeats are getting in the way of your playing, first reduce the effect level. If there's still something a little off, reduce the treble if possible. If that still doesn't do it, the clinical nature of a digital delay might not be for you. Switch to a darker analogue or tape mode if you're using a multi-effect, or pick up a BBD-based delay.

50 THE DRONE RANGER

Reverbs and delays go excellently with tremolo-picking, so it should come as no surprise that they also sound ace with drones. The combination of say, E-Bow drone notes and longer time settings allows you to create synth-like pads. If you don't have an E-Bow, then try volume swelling in a distorted guitar and capturing it with a looper in front of your time effects.

51 S-S-S-STUTTER

Using a looper or delay with the time set to its quickest repeat, you can capture a tiny buffer of audio and have it immediately play back. This machine-gun, typewriter-like rattle of repeats is a staple of riff articulation in genres like math and post-rock, as well as modern tech metal.

52 DON'T USE TOO HIGH DECAY OR FEEDBACK SETTINGS

Managing the dwell, decay or feedback control for reverb, and the feedback control for delay, is essential to sounding good. At home or playing solo, longer times sound amazing, giving you the feeling you're playing in a concert hall. In a band, live or recording mix however, longer times left unchecked can result in muddiness, phase issues and a lack of clarity. When in doubt, pull the control back until you can barely tell the effect is on, then turn it up until it sounds most impactful.

DRY
SHIFT 1
SHIFT 2
VALUE
ENTER/SAVE
EXT
EXP
SHIFT 1
SHIFT 2
EXP
AUX
LATCH
PRESET
X-MOD
USER
MAIN OUTPUT AUX
INPUT
PITCH FORK+
electro-harmonix
NEW YORK CITY, USA
BYPASS
USER

GET MORE FROM YOUR PITCH EFFECTS

53 CAN YOU REACH THE PEDALS YOU USE MOST?

It's all very well having the coolest pitch shifter, pad generator or cloud reverb on the market, but if you can't hit it cleanly when you need it, it's not much use. Pitch shifters, like wah or volume pedals, are usually used dynamically, or triggered using a momentary function. Make sure they're positioned on your 'board in an easy-to-reach place, so you can write riffs and parts around them with confidence.

54 PLAY SINGLE NOTES WITH ANALOGUE PITCH EFFECTS

If you're having trouble with note definition, tracking or heavy artefacts in your sound, then try playing single notes rather than chords. Older generations of digital pitch shifters and analogue octave units are often monophonic (they only process single notes). For some, they will attempt to keep up, generating artefacts along the way, while other units will not work as intended.

55 STACK PITCH SHIFTERS FOR EXTRA ARTEFACTS

If clean pitch-shifting isn't your bag, then you might be in the camp that enjoys jankiness, digital artefacts and grit. You're in good company, so why not lean into it like glitchcore noise merchants Melt Banana and stack pitch shifters? Yes, pretty quickly notes lose all definition, but that's part of the fun.

56 EXPLORE THE HARMONISER FUNCTIONS

Most pitch shifters also have a harmoniser, but very few players use them to their fullest. Trying off-kilter intervals like 4ths can add additional flavour to a riff that was 90 per cent there, but lacking that special sauce on top.

57 WHAMMY SCOOP AND DOOP

Floyd Rose users know how to use pitch bends to accentuate a note. A scoop involves pre-bending down, and then releasing into the note. A doop means hitting the whammy bar after a note, giving an elastic feel to the interval. Using a rocker pedal makes these downward pitch bends easy, while a ballistic shifter like the Boss PS-5 or PS-6, or DigiTech's Whammy Ricochet can make any shift robotically smooth in momentary mode.

58 BITCRUSHED CHORDS

Some modern octave and pitch pedals are polyphonic (they process multiple notes at the same time). For this, however, you'll need a pedal that isn't. Set up the pedal to shift and then play two-note chords with the unit fully wet. It won't quite work, but the resulting chords aren't totally incoherent either. You can hear the glassy strangeness of this in the intro riff to RATM's *Know Your Enemy*.

59 STACK PITCH SHIFTERS FOR RIFF PUNCTUATION

If you have two pitch shifters, you can create new articulation in riffs that sound impossible. For example, set a Whammy to one or two octaves up, while having a second pedal set to an octave down. As an added bonus, this can create artefacts that sound like a phaser pedal, especially if you have a dry signal chain bypassing the shifters.

60 ADD A DRONE NOTE

For those that like the glitchier side of pitch effects, adding a drone note to a riff or phrase is always a good call. Some tunings, like DADGAD, are optimised for drones. Even polyphonic shifters can track in weird and wonderful ways when faced with a persistent drone note. When shifting up, the strange added harmonic content and overtones are often mesmerising when paired with reverb or delay.

61 PLAY TO THE STRENGTHS OF ANALOGUE OCTAVERS

Many players have picked up analogue octave pedals like the Octavia, Green Ringer or EQD Tentacle only to be disappointed. Obviously the first thing to say is that these are not true pitch shifters like a digital unit. Still, there are some tricks to getting a clearer octave, for example using the neck pickup, and constructing riffs above the 12th fret. The same suggestion of pickup choice also applies for analogue octave-down pedals.

62 CREATE AUTO-RIFFING WITH A HARMONISER

Using either distortion to sustain a note, or a looper or E-Bow, it's possible to build whole drone riffs and chords using just a harmoniser. The Whammy has a harmoniser function where the pitch is controlled by a knob, and it's possible to 'play' a riff using this. As with anything Tom Morello has done on record, it's hard to unpick his magic tricks. However, the intro and verse riff in *Voice Of The Voiceless* can be replicated using this technique.

63 USE A BASS DI WITH OCTAVE-DOWN EFFECTS

With two-piece bands becoming more common, you might find yourself using a pitch shifting pedal or octaver to replace a bassist. In this case, make sure that you're using a pedal with a split output, like the Whammy IV, or EHX Micro/Nano POG. Then, run the wet out to either a dedicated bass amp, or a Bass DI box, and out to the sound desk. Even in smaller venues this will give you a weightier bottom end and clarity throughout the frequency range.

GET DIGI WITH IT

DigiTech's Whammy pedal rules the pitch shift roost

Washburn
N4

Words Amit Sharma Portrait Jaime Ballesteros

TONE PROS

NUNO BETTENCOURT

The **Extreme** virtuoso weighs in on why, when it comes to tone, your personality always comes first

How much does the gear you use inform the music you make?

I'll be backstage playing through this small Blackstar amp in the dressing room. And it sounds so good the sound guy will walk in and say, 'Can we just mic that fucking thing up?!' And then Steve Vai might come in and it will instantly turn into his sound. We know amps and guitars are important, but your own DNA is bigger than that. You end up realising that amps and pedals aren't there to elevate our playing, they're there to get out of the way of our playing. We all know what we sound like in our heads. That's what you want to come out of the speakers.

So gear can be a hindrance, in certain situations?

Yeah! Sometimes your tone can get in the way of what you're trying to say. You hear Eddie Van Halen on the first four or five albums and then you hear inklings of other effects and stereo splits on the later records, and it became something different. For me, it was all about raw Eddie, because he was just plugged in, with nothing else getting in the way. When you start processing things it can get lost a bit. If I use a delay or phaser, it has to colour what I'm doing rather than change what I'm doing. It's got to be a nuance effect.

But you use certain amps for a reason, right?

The amp you play through matters a bit but not hugely. For me right now, I happen to have a Marshall DSL in the studio that I like. But in a way, I'm not using DSLs, I'm just using one I like... there are a lot that I didn't like. It was the same with [third Extreme album] *III Sides To Every Story* – when I found the right Soldano head to interpret what my fingers were doing in 1993. Whenever I'm making music, I want something that doesn't get in the way of my DNA. I like hearing my personality come through. Even Zakk Wylde, when he's putting on the craziest effects and that crazy vibrato that sounds like two fretboard's worth, he still cuts through. It's all about making the gear work for you!

You've always loved your Rat pedal, which is quite untypical for more technically ambitious shredder-type guitarists...

Yeah, I always love going straight in except for that Rat pedal I have. It's supposed to be a distortion pedal but the distortion is all the way off. I find it just tightens my bottom end. I don't know one amp, from Marshall to Mesa/Boogie and everybody else, that has the enough chunkiness to it without this pedal. Sure you can get it when you play detuned or chordal heavy metal stuff like Metallica, but how do you do it when it's a single-note riff? Like a funkier song, let's say *Suzi (Wants Her All Day What?)* off *Extreme II: Pornograffitti*. I'm the only guitar player in the band so I wanted keep it muted and sound big. The only way to get the response I needed was with the Rat pedal. It's been there since day one and it ain't going anywhere. I've tried playing without it and f*ckin' hated it. Other players think it's not doing anything and would probably wonder if the battery is dead [laughs]. It doesn't change a single thing except for the tightness of the bass frequencies."

Is there any anything else that's really important to your tone?

Other than that, I might use some chorus on certain songs. I still use a Boss GT pedalboard, though the model has changed through the years. I love the way they sound. Some of those multi-effects can be a bit glitchy with a slight delay while you play. The Boss units are the only ones I've found that don't get in the way and I always use them through the loop. The only thing I might use in front other than the Rat is a Boss octave pedal. And for some reason, it's not because Eddie Van Halen passed away, I've been using my MXR Phase 90 a lot recently. I used to struggle with them back in the day, because they not only sound like Eddie, there's also a lot of suction. I like making that kind of sound with my fingers. I try to make my solos talk – that whole world in between harmonics and other noises – using just my hands. I took a lot of that from George Lynch and Warren DeMartini. That era of guitar players did it really well.

PHASE OF GLORY
Nuno tells us he's been breaking out the MXR Phase 90 lately

Words Amit Sharma **Photos** Rob Monk / Paul Rodgers

TONE TIPS
GET MORE FROM YOUR AMP

64 STICK WITH LOWER WATTAGES IN SMALLER SPACES

It's all too easy to get carried away with volume when buying a new valve amp. More power equals more tone, right? Well, no. That only really comes into effect when you're driving the valves hard at higher volumes on arena or festival stages. If you're playing small gigs and using your amp at rehearsal studios or home, a 20-watt combo will probably suit you better than a 100-watt behemoth you can't quite push to its full potential. If your high-wattage amp has a low-power mode or built-in power soak, try seeing how the tones compare, or consider using an external attenuator. "We've found great satisfaction with the Blackstar Artisan when recording in the studio," ZZ Top legend Billy Gibbons told TG in 2016. "They make a pretty wide range of gear, but that amp in particular is simple. It's a 15-watt single-speaker thing – almost an entry-level, low power piece, but it has this great sustain and depth."

65 GET CREATIVE WITH YOUR MIDRANGE

The mids control is often one of the most overlooked features to be found on the face of an amp. But given that the guitar is a midrange instrument, it's the kind of dial that can drastically shape your tone the most. Lead guitarists may benefit from keeping the mids halfway, or boosting them to help cut through, while rhythm guitarists – particularly those playing harder rock and heavy metal – usually opt for having the mids cut or in more extreme cases 'scooped' out almost completely, as typified by the late, great Pantera guitarist Dimebag Darrell.

66 USE MORE THAN AMBIENT EFFECTS IN THE LOOP

Your amp's send and return is perfect for effects like reverb and delay – especially if you're using overdrive and distortion. However, it's worth seeing how other pedals might sound in there, from boosts to modulation, because their insertion after the preamp section of your amp will ultimately make them behave in different ways. At the end of the day, you can never go wrong with more options out of the gear you already own.

67 TRY REVERBS AND DELAYS IN FRONT

There's a reason why most players put ambient effects in the loop rather than in the front end of their amp – echoes and reverbs can sound ambiguous and unmusical when run through overdrive or distortion. But, as we all know, there are no laws when it comes to tone. Porcupine Tree mastermind Steven Wilson actually prefers the more atmospheric noises produced this way. "I'm a big fan of putting the delay and reverb in front of the gain stage on amps," he told TG in 2020. "I'm not a big fan of that clean and polite way of putting the delay after the gain or in the loop. I love the sound of twisted metal, by which I mean the sound of distortion, reverb and delay fighting for supremacy in the gain stage of an amp. You get that Neil Young kind of messy grunginess to it. I like it sounding out of control. As a player, you almost have to fight to harness it. You hear that sound on old Mahavishnu Orchestra albums... trying to tame the beast and control all that information!"

68 USE YOUR GUITAR VOLUME INSTEAD OF SWITCHING CHANNELS

Some amps might have up to three or four channels for you to use, which can be great if you need to cover a lot of tonal ground in one performance. Instead of switching, however, you could always try dialling in your most overdriven sound and then backing it down via your guitar's volume control for more of a DIY clean and crunch channel. Ultimately it will make your guitar tones feel more seamless, existing as one sound with varying levels of gain and volume rather than the inconsistency of different voicings coming out of the same head or combo.

69 USE LESS GAIN FOR MORE CLARITY

Few things excite guitarists as much as the words 'more gain' – but it's worth remembering that using more gain and drive than you need can actually distract from the notes being played and make them less impactful. This is particularly important when recording, as there's an added tightness to lower levels of gain compared to more generous helpings. Listen to classic recordings by Rage Against The Machine, for instance, and you'll see how backing off the gain for more clarity can still yield some truly explosive results.

70 GO EASY ON THE TREBLE

It doesn't matter how accomplished you are as a player, if your sound comes across as unflattering and harsh, listeners will quickly get tired of hearing you. It's something Joe Bonamassa learned early on in his years of entertaining – and many would consider him to be an expert in such matters. "I'd rather play an evening where the guitar sounds a bit dull, than an evening where the guitar sounds a bit 'Holy sh*t' bright?!" he admitted in 2019. "Ear fatigue is a big thing about going to a guitar show. It's like, 'How do you make two hours seem like four?' Well, I can show you real easy: we'll take the baffles down and turn the gain up, and turn the brightness up. If you listen to B.B. King, it was like a human voice speaking. It was never gratey."

71 RUN DISTORTION PEDALS THROUGH YOUR AMP'S DRIVE CHANNEL

Guitar pedals react differently depending on what channel of your amp you've chosen to use. Though there are guitarists out there who are happy going in clean, the vast majority of us will use overdrive and fuzz with an amp sound that's already on the edge of breakup and beyond. The results are often smoother and warmer as the amp channel will be voiced specifically for the extra gain and drive. Using fuzz pedals on a clean channel often results in a harsher-sounding tone with an abundance of high harmonic information – which may work for some but generally isn't ideal.

SHARP TONED MAN
ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons is a master of making small amps sound huge

FRACTAL AUDIO SYSTEMS
Axe-Fx II
PREAMP FX PROCESSOR
G2 MODELING TECHNOLOGY
VALUE
NAV
ENTER
EXIT
PAGE
FRACTAL AUDIO SYSTEMS
MFC-101 MIDI FOOT CONTROLLER
PARAMETER
PAGE

Words Amit Sharma

TONE TIPS
GET MORE FROM YOUR MULTI-EFFECTS

72 USE YOUR MULTI-EFFECTS' COMPUTER SOFTWARE

Many multi-effects units have USB connectivity and come with software for more intensive tweaking, giving increased control over the parameters of each effect and amp model, as well as the signal chain in general. It's potentially the key to unlocking the exact sound you hear in your head. Even if your sonic requirements are relatively simple, the ability to experiment by dragging and dropping virtual effects around the signal chain can be a highly creative and fun process.

73 MAKE SURE YOUR PRESET LEVELS ARE SIMILAR

One of the most important things when using a multi-effect unit is having a uniform volume across all your presets. Uneven levels means your parts won't cut through the mix when you switch between presets. A smartphone app such as Decibel X can help you tackle the problem, giving you an idea of each preset's loudness – though make sure to unify output levels in your multi's menus too where possible. Be aware that clean sounds often have greater dynamic range than drive tones (a little compression can help even things out here). With cleans, crunches and heavy rhythms set roughly the same, next add in boosts for your lead tones. Again, start by making every boost roughly the same, then tweak it if a song needs more or less of a push.

74 GO DIRECT INTO YOUR AMP'S FX LOOP

If you prefer real amp tone over digital modelling, plug your multi-effect direct into the loop rather than the front of your amp. This will mean overdrives and distortions won't necessarily work as they should, however everything from boost and EQ to modulation and ambiences will still function well. When TG interviewed Avenged Sevenfold guitarist Synyster Gates at London's O2 Arena back in 2017, he explained how this was a fundamental part of his live rig. "We're using the Schecter Hellwin amps in tandem with the Fractal Axe-Fx, which is just in the loop for effects. I have delays, and you'll also hear some weird things happening to my guitar signal! I really like the harmoniser, we're you can do a lot of intelligent harmonising – like jumping from a 6th above to a 6th below, and it's all happening in the loop."

75 USE THE FOUR-CABLE METHOD

This is a way of connecting a multi-effect pedal to an amplifier using, you guessed it, four cables – but why bother? Well, the idea is to 'split' the virtual signal chain inside your multi unit to send certain effects to your amp's input (traditionally the drive effects), while placing others (typically modulation, delay, reverb etc) in the loop – giving you all the I/O options of a traditional pedalboard. All you need is for both your amplifier and your multi-effect unit to be equipped with an effect loop. Here's how to connect it all up:

1. **Guitar -> Multi-effect input**
2. **Multi-effect main output -> Amp effect loop return**
3. **Multi-effect loop send -> Amp main input**
4. **Amp loop send -> Multi-effect loop return**

76 TRY PUSHING DIGITAL MODELS TO UNREALISTIC EXTREMES

One of the best benefits of using digital gear is that you can do things that wouldn't otherwise be possible – whether that's dialling in levels of gain that real amps wouldn't normally be capable of or tweaking digital recreations of famous pedals far beyond their usual remit. For example, classic Fender amps tend not to offer extreme levels of distortion, but in the virtual world such limitations might not exist. The same goes for delay times, reverb depths, chorus rates etc on the digital versions of your favourite pedals.

77 COMBINE YOUR FAVOURITE ANALOGUE PEDALS WITH YOUR MULTI-EFFECTS UNIT

Some players prefer to stick with analogue overdrives and fuzz pedals in front of the amp's input and then run their digital gear in the effect loop – creating a best of both worlds scenario. This way you keep a lot of the functionality from your multi-effects device but the core of your tone is coming from handpicked pedals and amps. It's how Swedish progressive metallers Opeth were running their amps when they headlined Wembley Arena in 2016. "I have an Axe-Fx but I only use it for timed echoes and weird noises... I prefer having my real pedals out with me," singer/guitarist Mikael Åkerfeldt told TG.

78 SAVE ONE GROUP OF PRESETS FOR HUMBUCKERS AND ANOTHER FOR SINGLE COILS

If you use different styles of guitars, it may be worth doubling-up on presets so your tones cater for different kinds of pickups. Humbuckers tend to have a higher output that'll break up quicker, while single-coils may need an extra push or gain stage to find that high sustain sweet spot. Given how much memory you'll find on modern multi-effects units, it makes sense to tailor your favourite settings to different guitars.

79 USE COMPRESSION AND EQ TO BRING CLEAN SOUNDS TO LIFE

Digital gear has never felt closer to the real deal than it does right now – to the point where amp and pedal emulations are often too convincing for most people to tell the difference. Bring your cleans to life by using compression and EQ to add a little more soul to your tones and make them feel more real and full-bodied. Technically, you'd be reducing the dynamic range, but it'll help those clean tones pop!

80 RECORD UNPROCESSED, THEN REAMP

Advanced routing options under the hood of many multi-effect units allow you to record with your chosen preset activated while simultaneously recording a dry unprocessed signal. The benefit? You get to choose the best tone for your track at mixdown instead of committing to it when you record. Simply route the dry-recorded signal from your DAW back to your multi-effect (or any other rig at your disposal) to 'reamp' your take, rerecording it as it plays through the new preset. Try recording with loads of gain and sustain, then reamping with a gentler, cleaner sound.

Words Amit Sharma

TONE PROS
LARKIN POE

Tone is massively important for **Rebecca and Megan Lovell** – even when using in-ear monitors

81 START WITH THE SOUND THAT INSPIRES YOU MOST

Megan: Tone is really important to me. As a slide player, it's such a big part in harnessing that vocal quality of the style – which is actually what drew me to it in the first place. I have been searching for the ultimate tone for a very long time! I started out on Dobro and then picked up a 1940s Rickenbacker lap steel in my mid-teens. I was so struck by the tone of the Rickenbacker because it was so beautiful and mellow. I'm really glad I found that guitar early on, because it determined my sound through the years. I'm definitely the kind of person who finds something tried and true, and then likes to stick with it and build on it. So I found a tone I liked early on and it helped me zero in on what I was looking for. Just recently I have been developing my own signature with Beard Guitars inspired by that Rickenbacker with a custom Lollar Horseshoe pickup. I think we got close to that vintage sound, which is great because no one wants to bring a 70 year-old instrument out with them on tour!

82 AMP MODELLERS SHOULDN'T BE SNIFFED AT

Rebecca: My main tone right now is a Stratocaster going into the MXR Sugar Drive, which is a Klon clone. It's so itty-bitty but it sounds huge and has become my favourite overdrive, going into my Fender Deluxe. But another thing that I've been amazed by is the Iridium by Strymon. We do so much overseas touring that being able to have a level of consistency is really important to us, especially when we can't rely on the quality of the backline. It's basically an amp modeller in the form of a pedal. It sounds unbelievable! We use in-ears and I know a lot of players find it to be a diminutive experience, it can make you feel a lot smaller than stood next to a cranked amp. But honestly having the Iridium running into our in-ears is not disappointing at all.

83 LEARN FROM THE MASTERS

Megan: Tone has such a huge impact on what I come up with, especially in terms of sustain. If I plug in and don't have that grit, I find things very difficult. I wish I was the kind of person who could plug into any amp and just go, but I need some sort of drive in order to play how I play. Some people can really rock a clean lap steel and it will have more of that Hawaiian country sound, but that's never been me. I live on the more rock 'n' roll side of lap steel! I think David Lindley is one of the greatest lap steel players of all-time. Everyone should check out his solo on *Running On Empty*, it's as iconic as it gets. I also think *The Dark Side Of The Moon* by Pink Floyd has some of the best lap steel tones ever recorded.

Rebecca: In terms of my favourite tones ever recorded, I think Brian May is really high up there. Even though I don't feel like I emulate his playing very much, on songs like *Killer Queen* he really drew me into the melodic nature and texture of guitar tones. We listened to a lot of rock records as kids. There was always something really unique and vocal about Brian's tone – it ignited my imagination about the capability of a guitar. It's an instrument that could be like the human voice and play lines that are incredibly singable. His tone is like toothpaste! Every guitarist should be in search of their toothpaste tone!

84 CONTEXT IS KEY

Megan: There's a lot to consider in terms of the context of our tones. The two of us have definitely impacted each other because our band basically has two lead guitarists – we have to make sure our sounds don't cancel each other out. So we try to find some different tones and ranges to coexist in. I could probably be more full-blown when it comes to overdrive but I try not to because Rebecca tends to occupy that space. I have to stay a hair cleaner to lay off of her tone. I tend to plug into my TB Drive pedal by Rodenberg, which is Tyler Bryant's signature and kinda like two Tube Screamers stacked. It's a really great pedal and has such a warm drive... because as a slide player, there's so much metal on metal on metal, I'm always looking to bring in those low mids. This pedal does a great job with that. I run that pedal into a Fender Deluxe and that's all I need.

Rebecca: That's why it's good to think of your tone in the context of the other players in your band. Try to make sure you have the whole spectrum covered rather than beating a dead horse of one singular vibe. Sometimes I'll use different pedals to cover different spaces. I have to shout out the Royal Jelly overdrive/fuzz blender by Beetronics. That's been really a cool pedal for me to experiment with. It's very versatile, you can do so much with it thanks to the EQ sweeps. It's funny, a lot of people think it's an octave sound when I kick it on for a solo, but it's not. It just has such a broad range, especially on the low end, that it gives that you that feeling of things being extra beefy and fat. It's a very inspiring pedal to solo on!

COVER FEATURE

Words, guitars and backing Jon Bishop

ICONS OF TONE

Get inside the tones and techniques of 15 of the greatest players ever to pick up a guitar

Welcome to our Icons of Tone lesson, in which we set sail on an odyssey of exploration, taking in the sounds and techniques of the most legendary guitarists in the history of rock and pop. We've created 15 tab examples that take inspiration from each of our chosen guitarists' work. Learning our riffs and licks will provide you with technical insight into how they play and give you a vehicle to experiment with your own tone creation. As ever, you'll find full audio mixes so you can hear our creations, plus guitar-free examples to jam along to.

Don't worry too much about your gear, however. Your main goal should be to hone your touch and feel as you emulate the style of each guitarist. It's a key part of tone – and often somewhat underrated! Not convinced? Don't take our word for it. As Brian May told TG in 2020 when discussing his experience of playing Eddie Van Halen's Frankenstein guitar during the making of their collaborative *Star Fleet Project* mini-album: "I sounded like me on his guitar and he sounded like him on my guitar, which reassured us that it's basically all in the fingers."

So, plug in and get ready to rock. The examples are in no particular order so let's get cracking…

85 GREENY HUMBUCKER TONE

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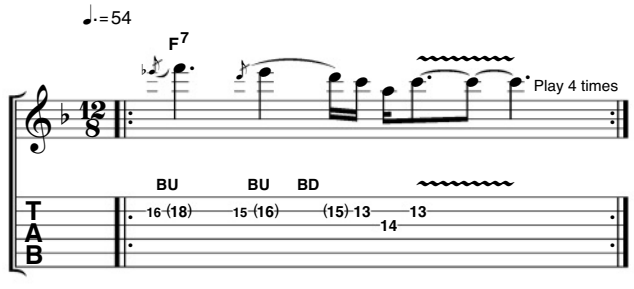

Peter Green's 1959 Gibson Les Paul is an iconic instrument with a great history. Its famously 'nasal' tone comes from an out-of-phase neck position PAF humbucker, which is evident when the pickup selector is in the middle position. Our short lick is inspired by Fleetwood Mac's classic *Need Your Love So Bad*.

86 '80S POP-FUNK SINGLE COILS

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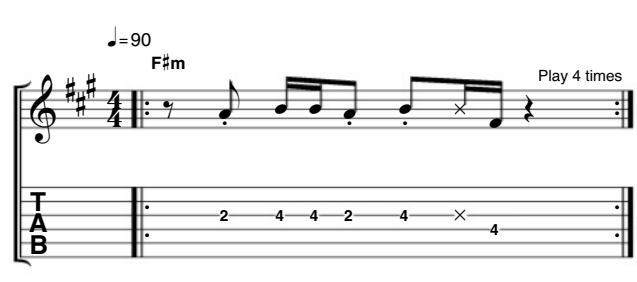

The David Williams brand of funky R 'n' B guitar made him an in demand session guitarist and his playing has graced some of the biggest selling records of all time, such as Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. Our example combines a light palm mute with alternate picking.

87 FLOYDIAN CLEANS

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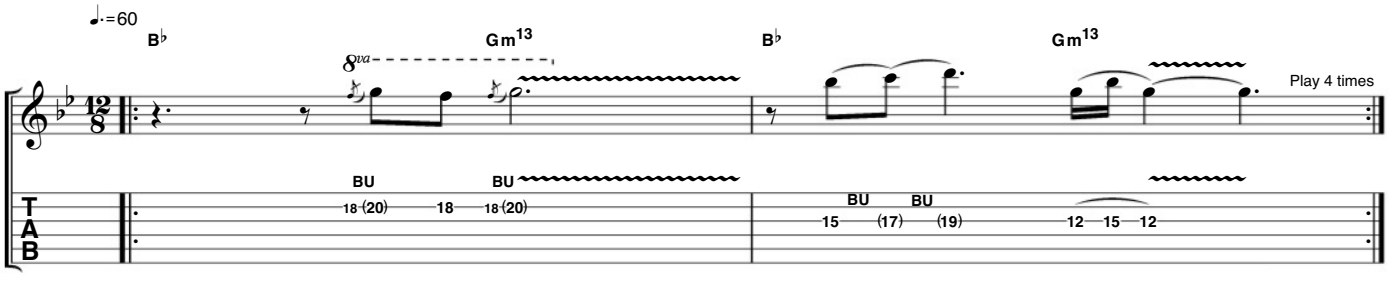

David Gilmour's clean tone soloing is iconic, and our example is inspired by tracks like *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* and *Echoes*. The trick is to dial in a sparkling clean tone with a neck single-coil pickup and to increase the sustain with the use of a compressor.

88 DEREK TRUCKS-STYLE FINGERSTYLE SLIDE

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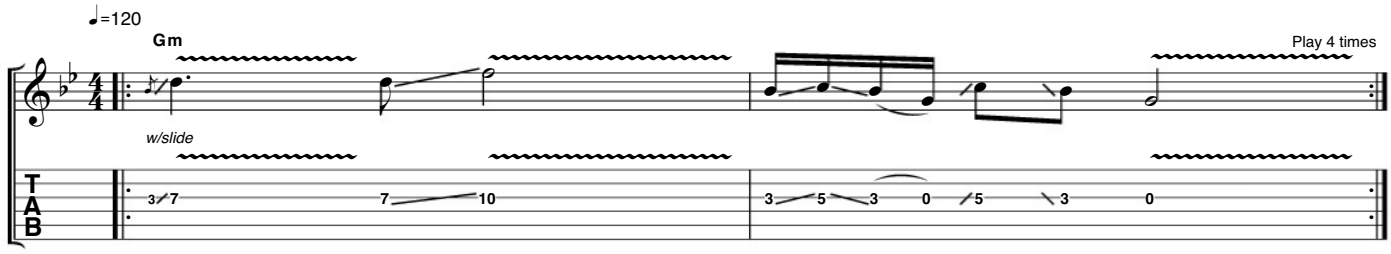

Derek Trucks is one of the finest players ever to pick up a bottleneck slide, employing fingerstyle to coax the most expressive tones from his Gibson SG. The lines between the tab numbers indicate how to phrase our Trucks style lick. Aim to accurately position your slide directly over each fret, not behind.

89 COUNTRY GENT

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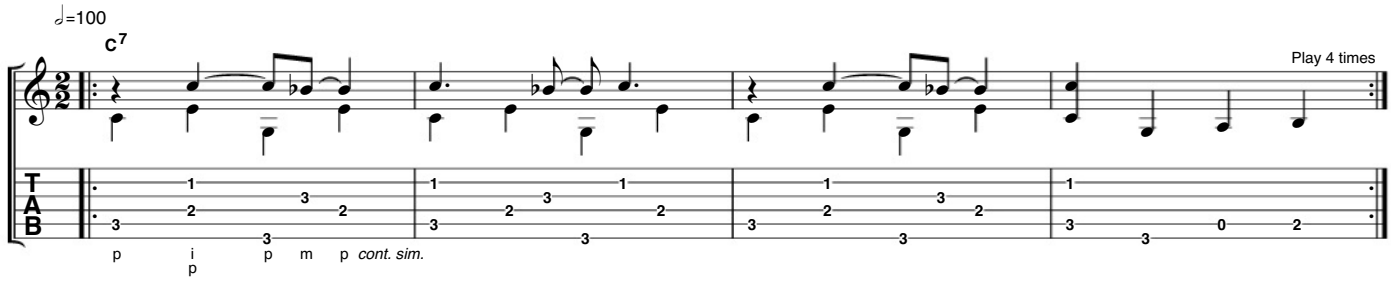

Chet Atkins' trademark country stylings come courtesy of his Gretsch G6120 equipped with Filter'Tron humbuckers. He was a master of Travis picking and, as such, our example combines a bassline with melody notes to create one big fingerpicking sound.

90 MASTER OF METAL

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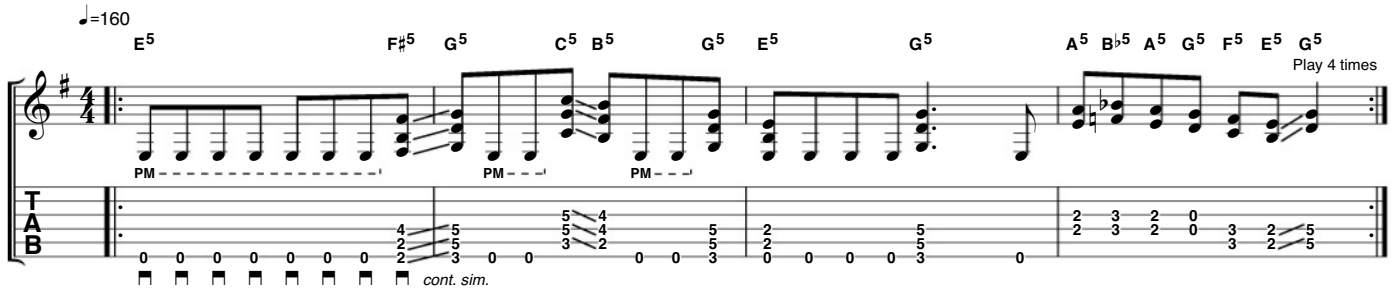

This Metallica-style riff is inspired by songs like *Through The Never*, showcasing Hetfield trademarks such as sliding powerchords and palm-muted bass notes. The tone on the 'Black Album' is the combination of many layered guitars through modified Mesa/Boogie Mark II and Marshall JCM800 amps – and is basically impossible to recreate!

91 YOUNG AT HEART

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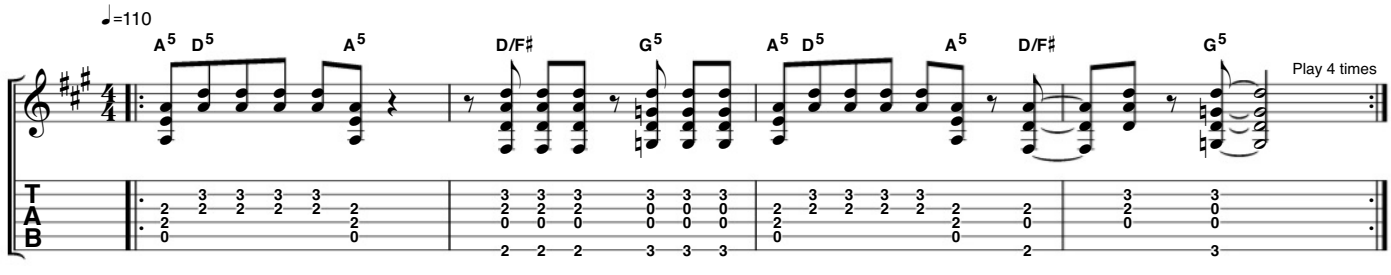

AC/DC rhythm machine Malcolm Young created the band's unrelenting groove with Gretsch Jet Firebird and White Falcon guitars. Our example is inspired by songs like *Hells Bells* and combines open position powerchords with a tight feel. A bridge pickup through a loud but fairly clean Marshall valve amp are the tonal secret sauce.

92 EDGY DELAYS

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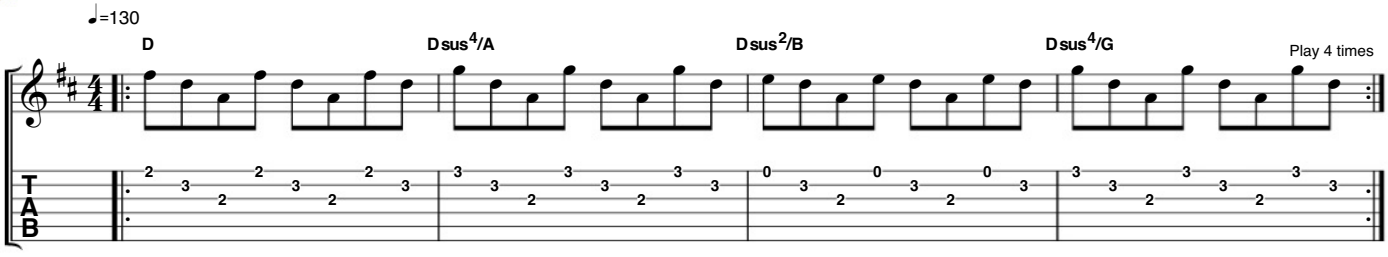

Here, we're taking our inspiration from U2's classic *With Or Without You* – a track that epitomises The Edge's iconic delay tones. Ideally, you need two delays: one set to a dotted semiquaver repeat, and another with a crotchet setting. The use of a dimpled grip pick like the blue 88mm Herdim plectrum sharpens the attack.

93 HEARTBREAKING SOUND

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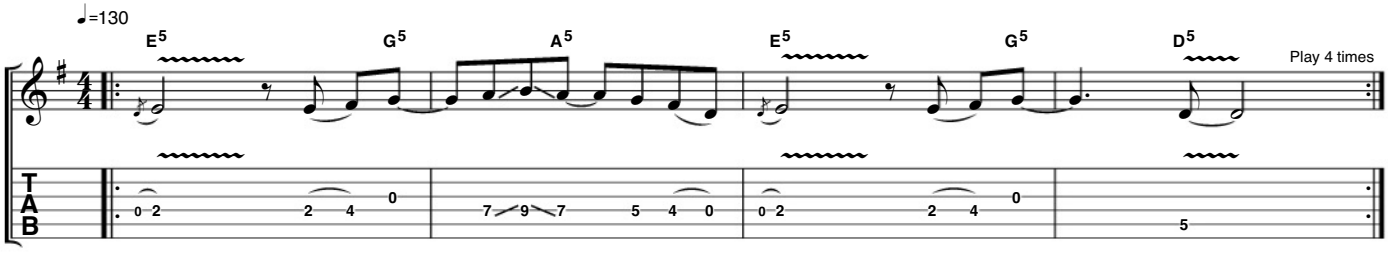

Mike Campbell of Tom Petty And The heartbreakers fame is one of the unsung heroes of great guitar tone. Our example is inspired by songs like *Refugee* and combines a bridge pickup tone with a dynamic overdrive setting.

94 CLAPTON'S 'WOMAN' TONE

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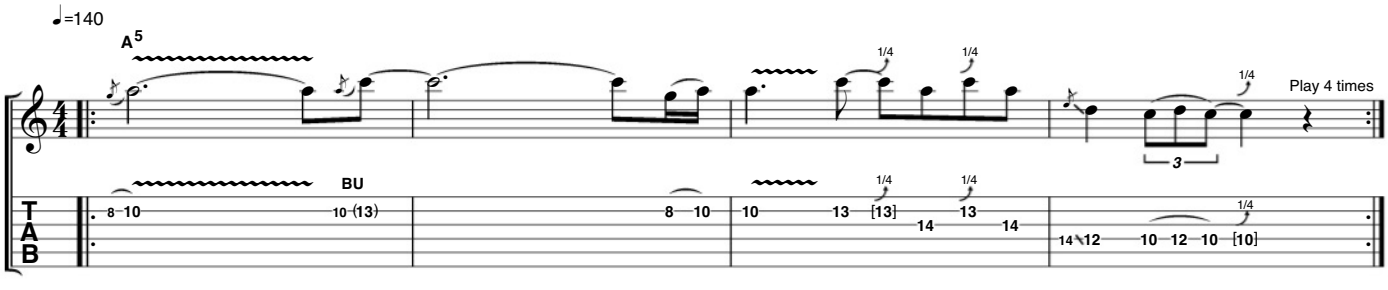

Eric Clapton's legendary 'woman tone' is a created by selecting a neck humbucker and rolling off the tone knob almost to zero. This provides that distinctive nasal tone was a feature of Clapton's early work with Cream. Our example is inspired by songs like *SWLABR* and includes string bending and finger vibrato.

95 WARM WES TONES

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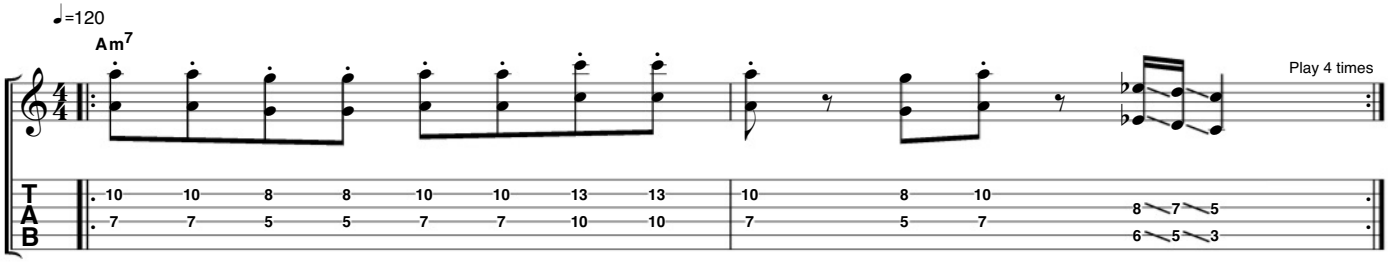

Jazz guitar great Wes Montgomery used an idiosyncratic thumbing technique for both picking and strumming, the soft flesh coaxing warm, round tones from his Gibson L-5 (set up with super-heavy 0.014-gauge flatwound strings). It can take a bit of practice to play melodies and articulate finger slides in octaves, but you can use down-strums of the thumb exclusively for playing our *Tequila*-inspired part.

96 MAY YOU ROCK!

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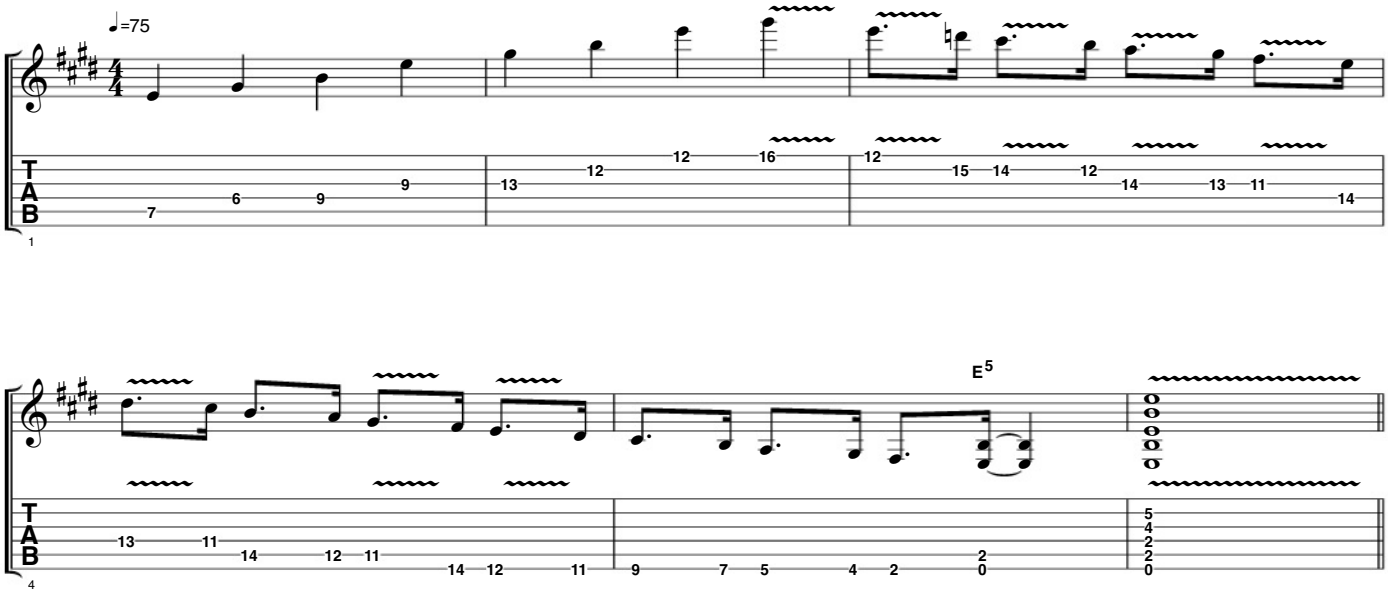

Brian May's iconic tone is the product of several factors. Most important is his home-built Red Special guitar, equipped with Burns single-coil pickups and an innovative switching system that allows him to dial in humbucker-like tones. Add to that a Vox AC-30 with Dallas Rangemaster treble booster plus the all-important sixpence piece for a pick. Our example is inspired by Queen's *Brighton Rock*.

97 EDDIE VAN HALEN-STYLE 'BROWN SOUND'

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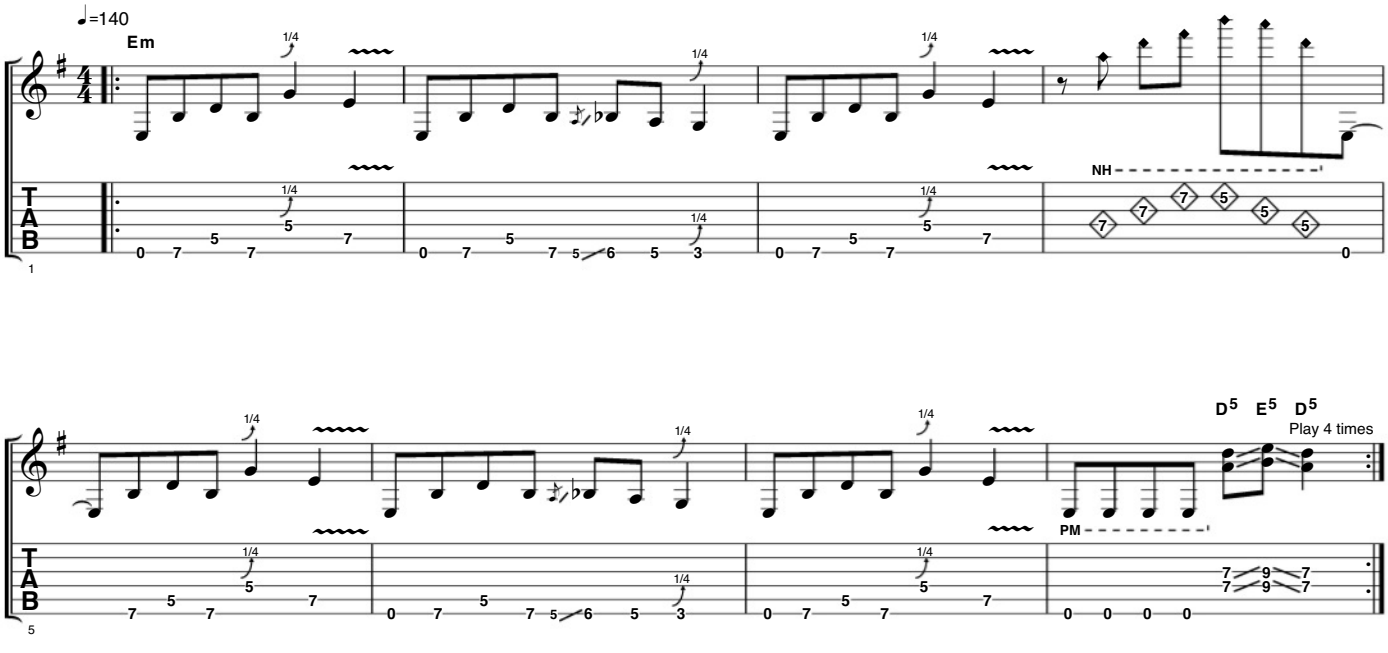
Eddie Van Halen's early signature 'brown sound' was the product of his Frankenstein guitar (essentially a single-humbucker loaded Strat) running into late-'60s Marshall Superlead amps. These were essentially un-modded but were used with a variable transformer and dummy load box to control the voltage the amps would run at and the level they'd output to the Celestion-loaded Marshall cabs. He augmented his sound with MXR Phase 90 and flanger pedals. Our riff here is inspired by *Little Dreamer* from Van Halen's 1978 debut, but there are plenty of Eddie-isms for you to try out.

98 STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN-STYLE TEXAS TONES

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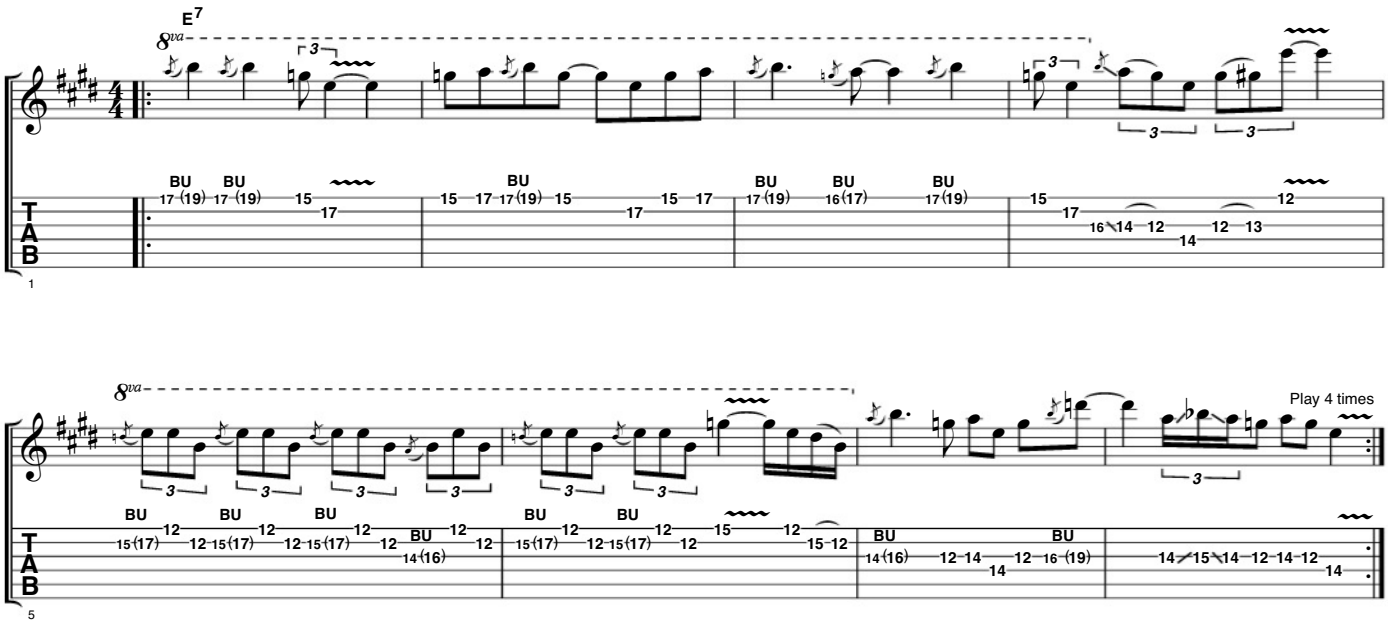

Stevie Ray Vaughan's supercharged Texas blues tone is one of the most emulated guitar tones of all time, and has inspired a raft of imitators. Stevie combined high output, single-coil pickups on his Fender Strats (set up with gauge .013 strings) with the Ibanez Tube Screamer through Fender and Dumble amplifiers. Our example is inspired by songs like *Pride And Joy* and compiles some of those tried and tested blues shuffle licks into a short solo.

99 JIMI HENDRIX-STYLE EFFECTS EXPLOITATION

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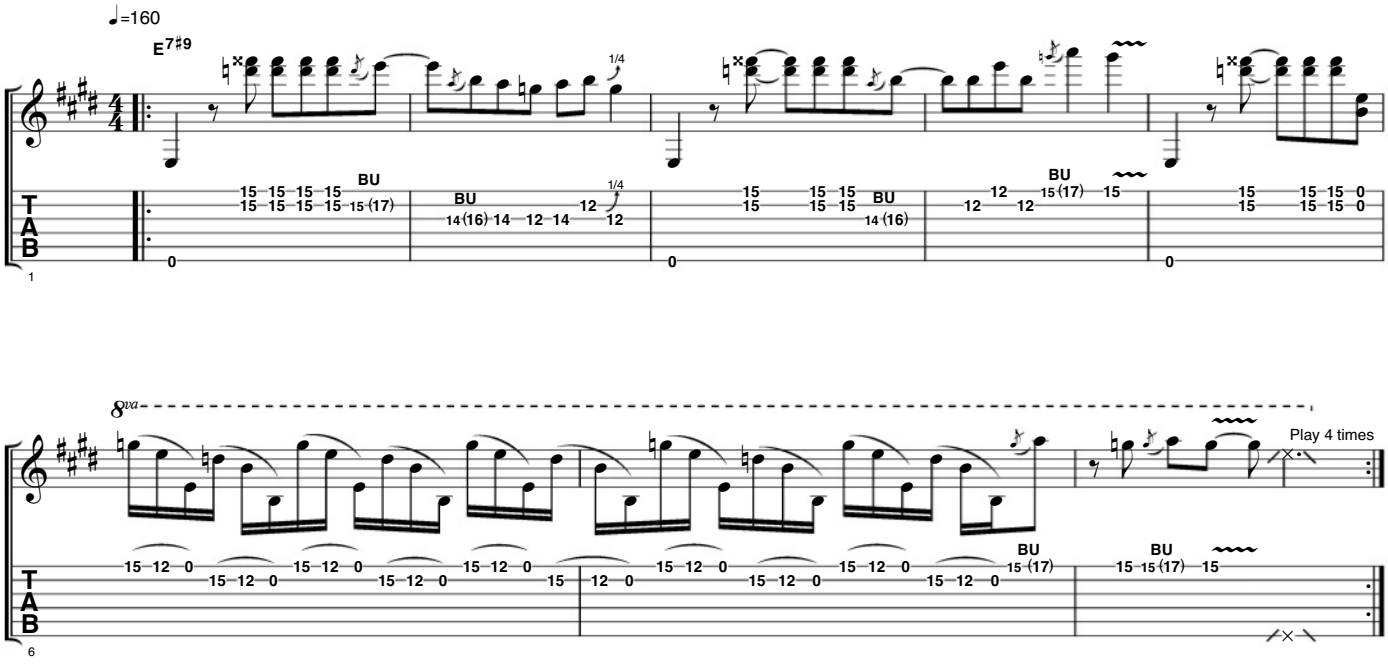

Jimi Hendrix changed everything with his inventive exploitation of effects and the electric guitars controls and features. Our example is inspired by songs like *Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)*, and exploits one of Jimi's favorite chords: the E7#9, often referred to as the 'Hendrix chord'. A Uni-Vibe effect works particularly well with these Hendrix-style wig outs, as does a Fuzz Face (or similar) pedal.

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PINK FLOYD

COMFORTABLY NUMB

You want great tone? Gilmour delivers in spades with effortless bends and haunting melodies on this Pink Floyd masterpiece from *The Wall*

Photo Getty Guitars and backing Steve Allsworth

SOUND ADVICE

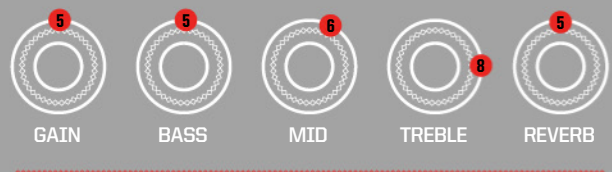
Everything you need to know before playing 'Comfortably Numb'

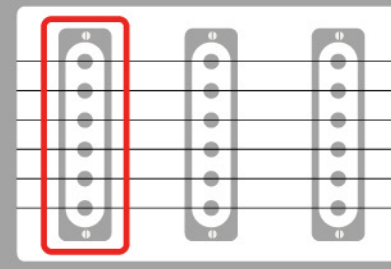
Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour is revered as one of rock's finest players. When most people think of a player with taste, poise, immense phrasing and silky of tones, few names will crop up as regularly as his.

Comfortably Numb features two epic solos that define many of the traits with which Gilmour is associated: three-fret string bends, whammy-bar vibrato, memorable melodies, expressive pentatonic phrasing and more. It's incredible how much mileage he gets out of solos that will often only use a couple of scale shapes. Notice how many of his ideas are easy to remember and easy to sing, with a definable shape and journey; something worth considering when embarking on your own longer solos.

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL OVERDRIVE



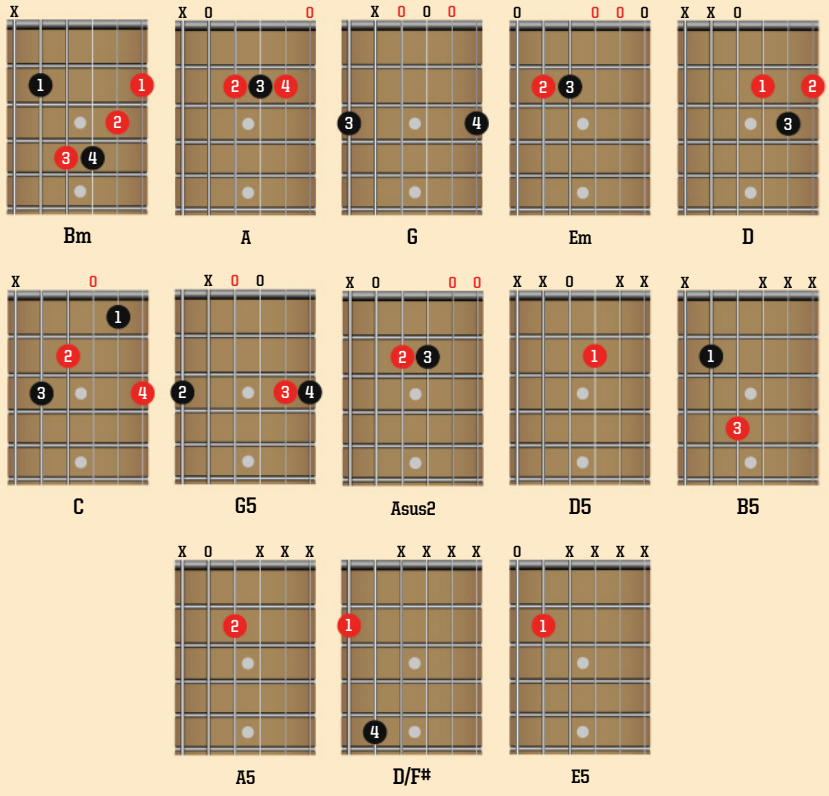


A bridge-position single-coil pickup is a vital part of David Gilmour's guitar sound for this track and many others.

For the solos, David used the bridge pickup of his maple-necked Fender Strat with an Electro Harmonix Big Muff pedal driving a Hiwatt DR103 amp and a quietly-mixed Leslie for added depth. Delay was set to about 480ms with four or five repeats. You'll find Big Muff and Leslie effects in many multi-fx pedals and digital modelers. Try Marshall Plexi or Fender Twin amp models in the absence of a Hiwatt preset. The delay for verse 1 should be set to a dotted eighth note repeat at about 705ms.

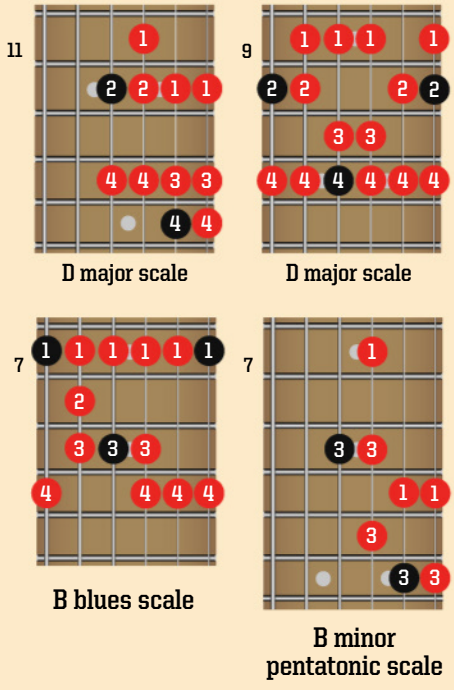
CHORDS

The acoustic guitar parts are tuned to David's take on Nashville tuning. The sixth string is two octaves higher than standard; the third, fourth and fifth strings are one octave up; and the first and second strings are standard tuned. It's still standard tuning (EADGBE), just in different octaves, so it's fine to use a standard tuned guitar to save the hassle of re-stringing your axe.



SCALES

The song is mainly in B minor (B C# D E F# G A), but the brighter first solo and choruses are in D major (D E F# G A B C#). The two keys share the same notes so you'll be dealing with the same pool of notes, just with different starting notes (AKA root notes). In the outro solo David uses a handy B minor pentatonic shape that spans six frets using only the first and third fingers. It's great for blitzing through two or three shapes of the same scale.



PINK FLOYD
COMFORTABLY NUMB

FULL TAB

COMFORTABLY NUMB
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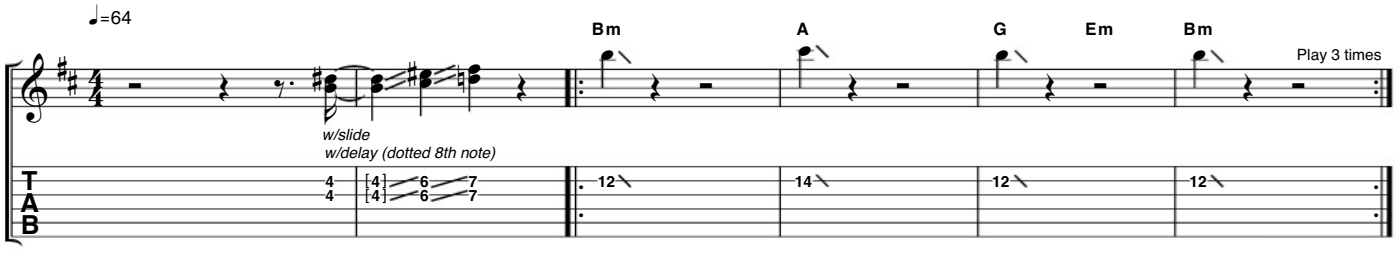
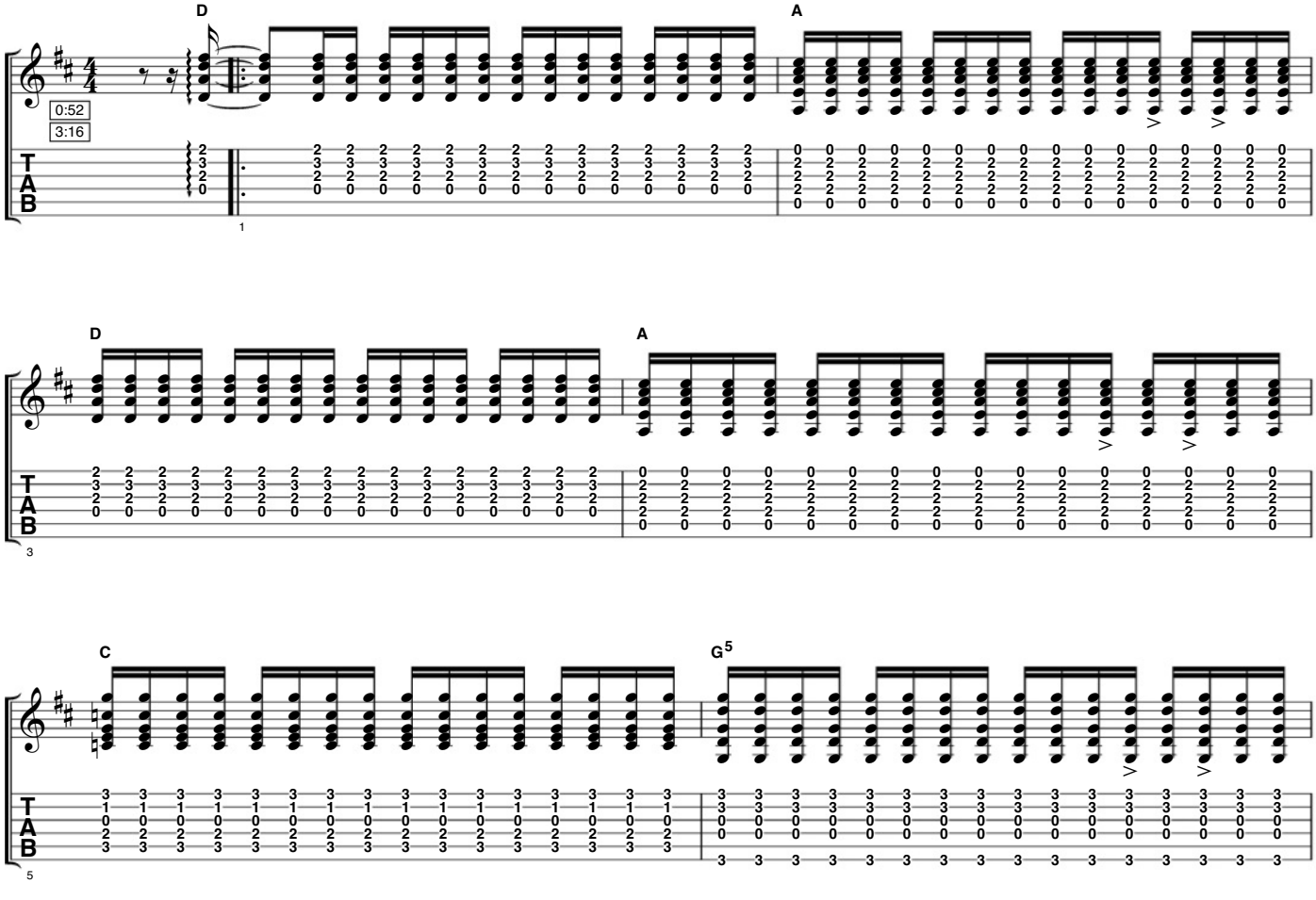
PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB Intro / verse 1 **bit.ly/tg375audio**

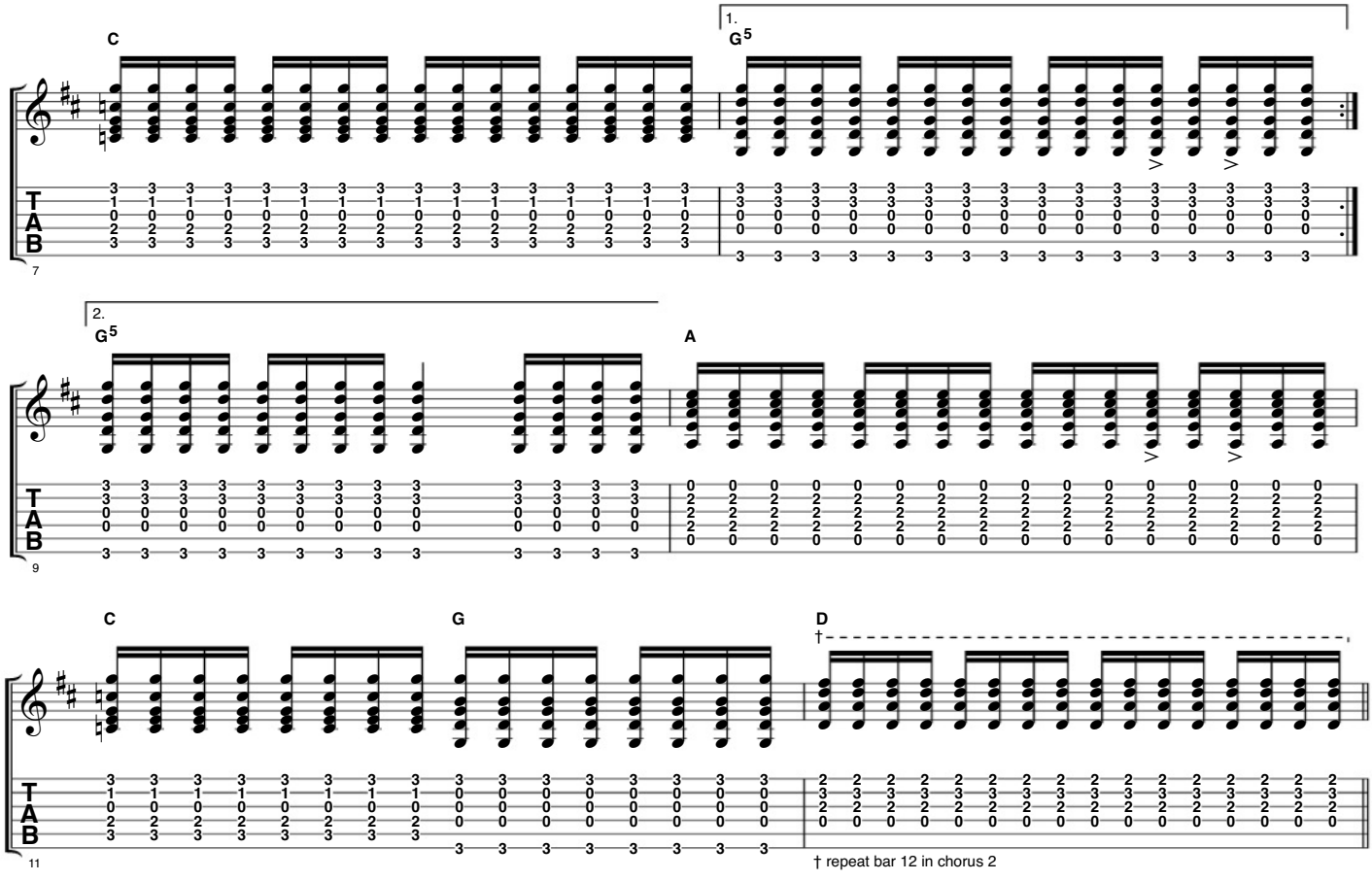


Using a slide and setting up a panning 'ping pong' style delay should get you close to the sound here. Wear your slide on your third or fourth finger and keep your first and second fingers in contact with the strings for a more noise-free sound. Pick with fingers or thumb for better control of tone and volume.

PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB Pre-chorus / chorus (acoustic guitar) **bit.ly/tg375audio**

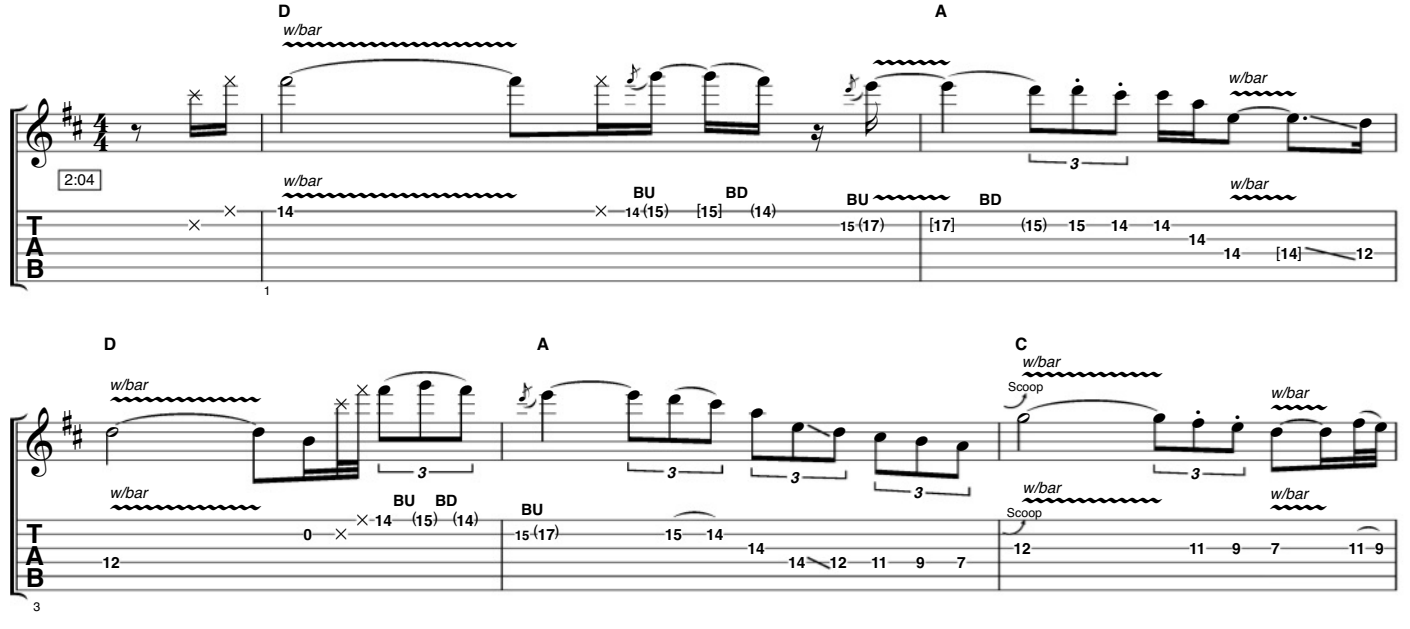


PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB **Pre-chorus / chorus (acoustic guitar, cont'd)** **bit.ly/tg375audio**



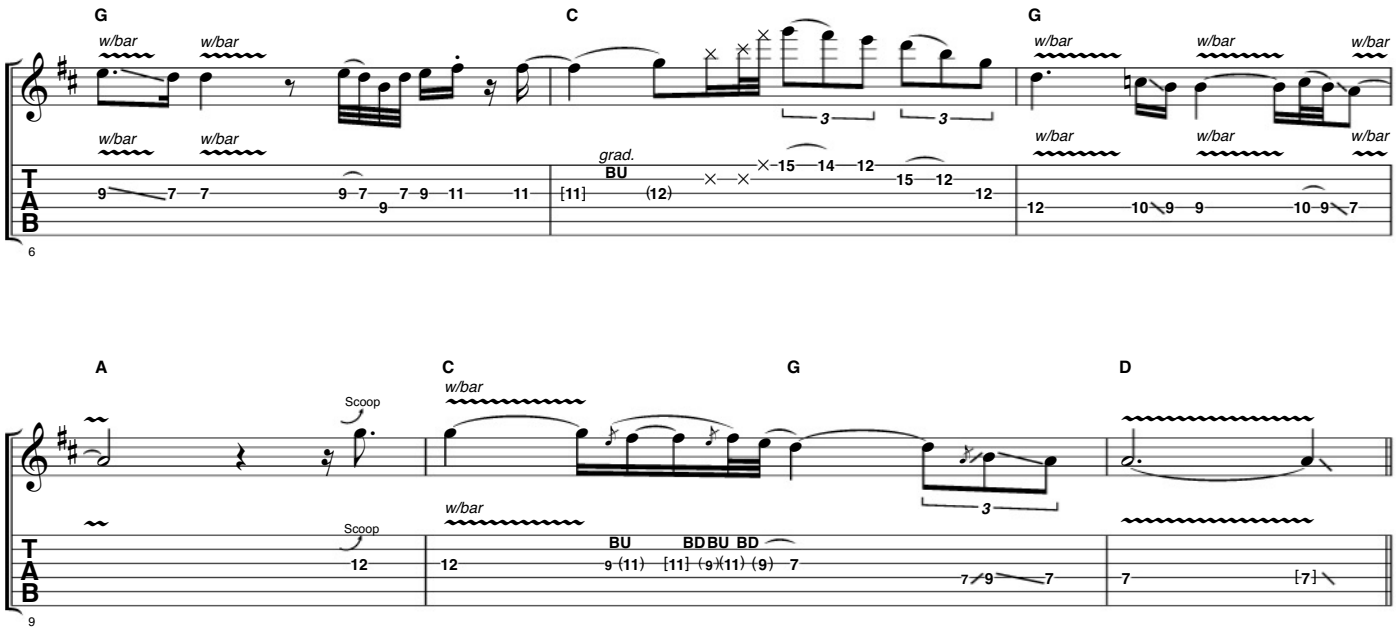
Look out for occasional accent marks (>) late in bars 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. These tell you to emphasise the chords in question with a louder strum, providing a bit of movement to an otherwise steady rhythm. If you're playing this part on electric guitar don't be afraid to add a bit of space – the constant 16th note rhythms can sound a tad heavy without the 'zing' of the Nashville-tuned acoustic guitar that appears on the recording.

PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB **Solo 1** **bit.ly/tg375audio**



PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB Solo 1 (cont'd)

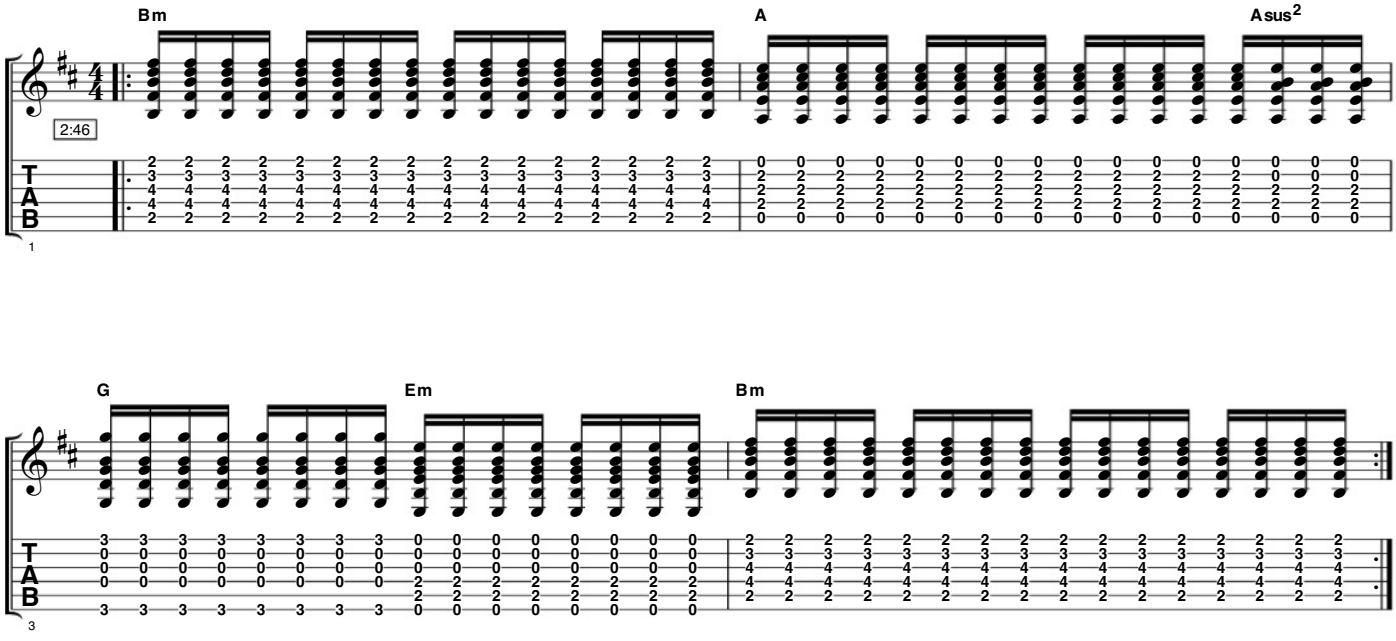
bit.ly/tg375audio



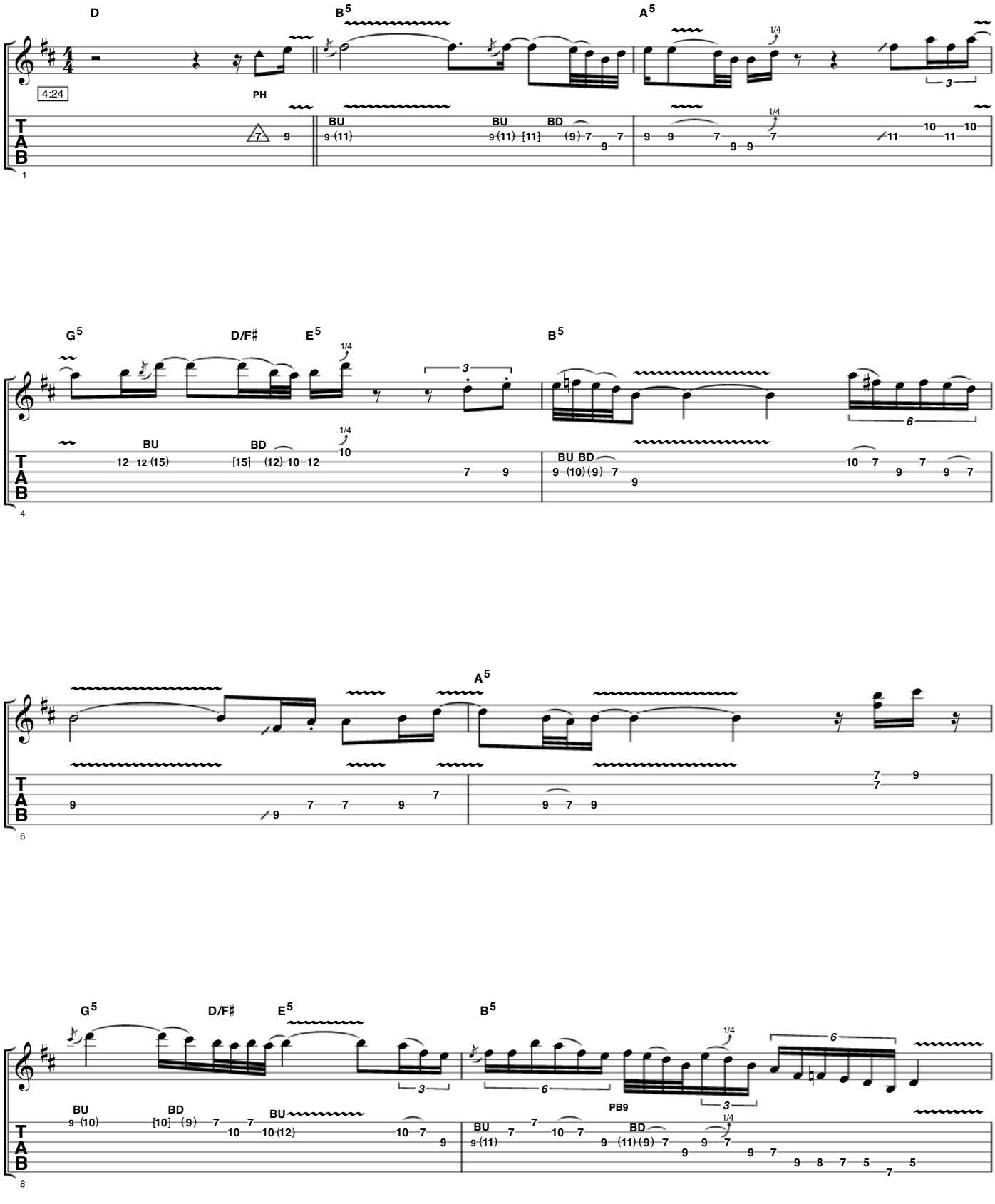
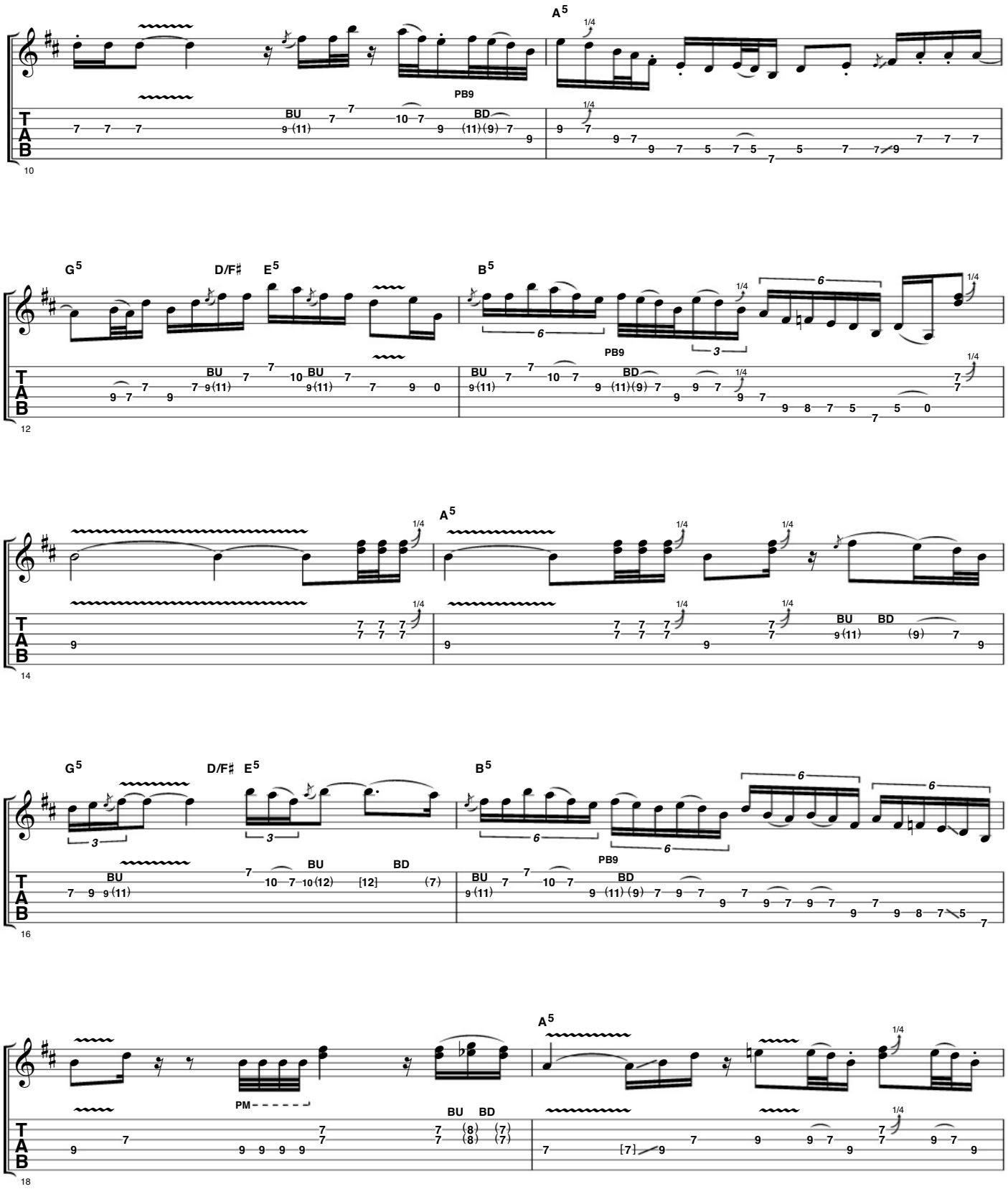
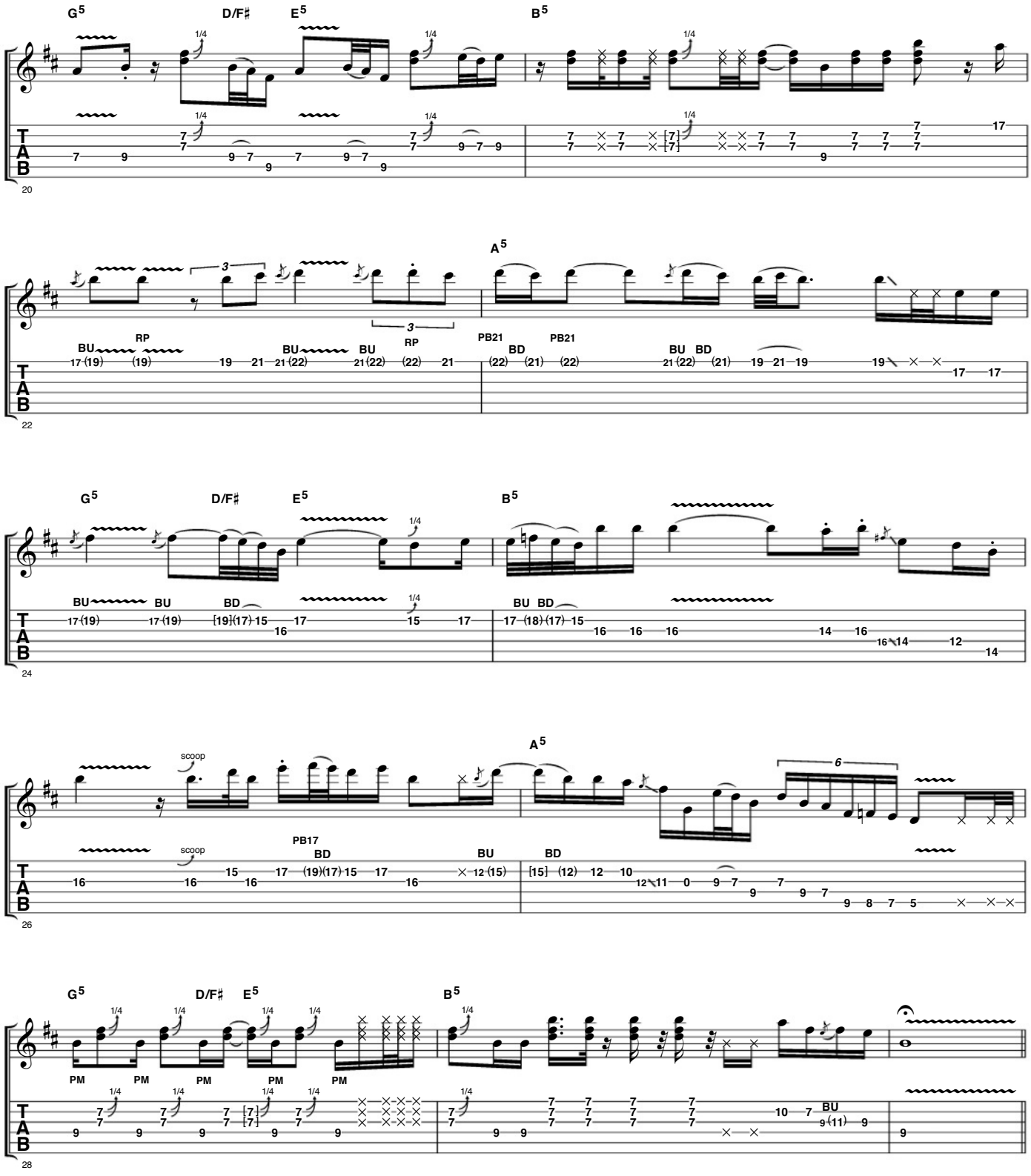
String bends, slides, legato and whammy bar phrasing all feature here in the first solo. With so much going on, start by disregarding these techniques and play through the core of the melody – this will give you some insight into Gilmour's note choice, in particular how he uses D and A major arpeggios among his more scale-oriented licks. David's triplet rhythms give these licks a sense of space in contrast with the constant 16th notes of the acoustic guitar.

PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB Verse 2

bit.ly/tg375audio



The rhythm here is essentially the same as the chorus, but with those steady 16th notes outlining the Bm-A-G-Em chord progression. The real reason you should know this section inside out is that it will help you see how Gilmour targets chord tones during the outro solo – which follows the same chord progression.

PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB Outro solo **bit.ly/tg375audio**

PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB Outro solo (cont'd) **bit.ly/tg375audio**

PINK FLOYD COMFORTABLY NUMB **Outro solo (cont'd)** **bit.ly/tg375audio**

This solo is delivered with a more aggressive bluesy style. If you choose to improvise, it's worth looking at some of David's trademark ideas that he uses to pace the solo. The sextuplet lick in bar 9 is a short idea that Gilmour returns to. At bar 22 he climbs up to the 19th position to begin the climax to the solo, having hovered around the 7th fret until then. This is a great way to break up a solo into distinct areas, rather than simply noodling up and down the neck.

OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

THE KILLERS
MR. BRIGHTSIDE

Always wanted this tune in your set but were worried about tackling that intro riff? Then read on, we've even included a work around for that, too!

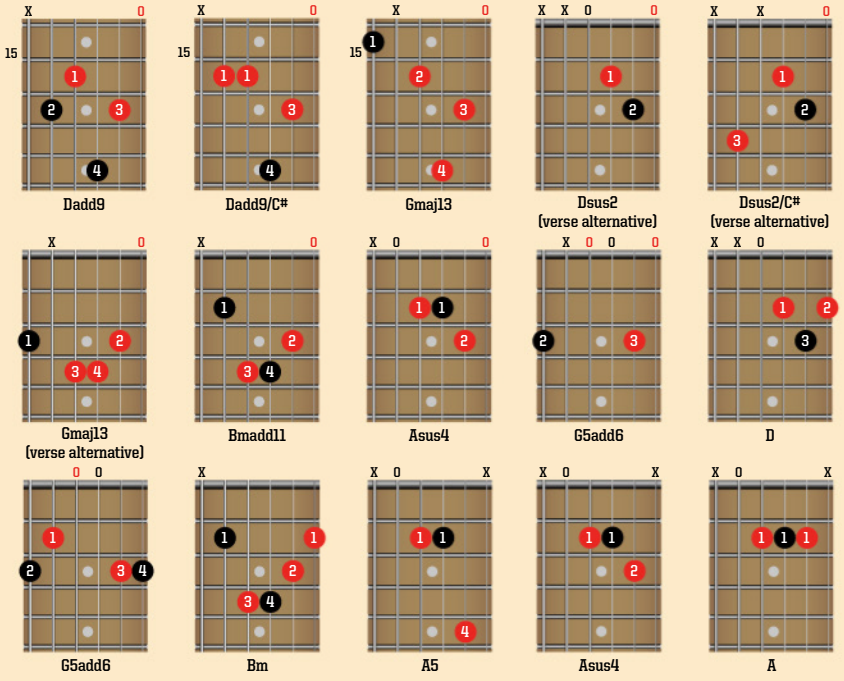
It hardly seems possible that this song could be 20 years old, but *Mr. Brightside* was The Killers' debut single back in 2003. One of the first songs to emerge from the fledgling writing partnership of Brandon Flowers (lead vocals, keyboards) and Dave Keuning (lead guitar/vocals), it catapulted the Las Vegas rockers to instant fame, quickly achieving worldwide multi-platinum status and featuring on their debut album *Hot Fuss* upon its release the following year.

Dave Keuning's distinctive guitar style is due in part to his wide range of influences: from Johnny Marr to Angus Young. The intro/verse riff requires some deft fingering, so if you're not blessed with long fingers like Keuning then check out the alternative chord shapes we've provided.

Using our suggested chord shapes you'll find that it's easy to pull off a very convincing accompaniment. Note that The Killers recorded this song with the guitars tuned down a semitone to E♭, but we've kept our audio track in standard tuning to save you the hassle.

CHORDS

If you're finding the riff challenging, try strumming the alternative chord shapes shown here instead. These are perfect for creating an unplugged acoustic version, especially if you're singing *and* playing rhythm. Similarly, the last three chords of the chorus (A5, Asus4 and A) can all be replaced with an open A shape if you prefer to keep things simple.



MR. BRIGHTSIDE
Words and Music by Brandon Flowers, Dave Keuning, Mark Stoermer and Ronnie Vannucci
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Guitars and backing Phil Capone **Photo** Getty

BACKING TRACK (bit.ly/tg375audio)
This song comes with a backing track. Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

SONGSHEET

Mr. Brightside

Intro
Dadd9 Dadd9/C♯ Gmaj13 /

Verse
Dadd9 Dadd9/C♯
Coming out of my cage
Gmaj13
And I've been doing just fine

Gotta, gotta be down, because I want it all
Dadd9 Dadd9/C♯
It started out with a kiss
Gmaj13
How did it end up like this?
Dadd9
It was only a kiss, it was only a kiss
Dadd9/C♯
Now I'm falling asleep
Gmaj13
And she's calling a cab

While he's having a smoke
Dadd9
And she's taking a drag
Dadd9/C♯
Now they're going to bed
Gmaj13
And my stomach is sick

And it's all in my head, but she's touching his...

Pre-chorus
Bmadd11
Chest now
Asus4
He takes off her dress now
G5add6
Let me go
Bmadd11
And I just can't look
Asus4
It's killing me
G5add6
And taking control

Chorus
D G Bm
Jealousy, turning saints into the sea
A5 Asus4 A Asus4 D
Swimming through sick lullabies
G Bm
Choking on your alibis
A5 Asus4 A Asus4 D
But it's just the price I pay
G Bm
Destiny is calling me
A5 Asus4 A Asus4 D G
O - pen up my eager eyes
Bm A Asus4 A Asus4
'Cause I'm Mr. Bright - side

Interlude
D G Bm A5 Asus4 A Asus4 x2

Repeat verse

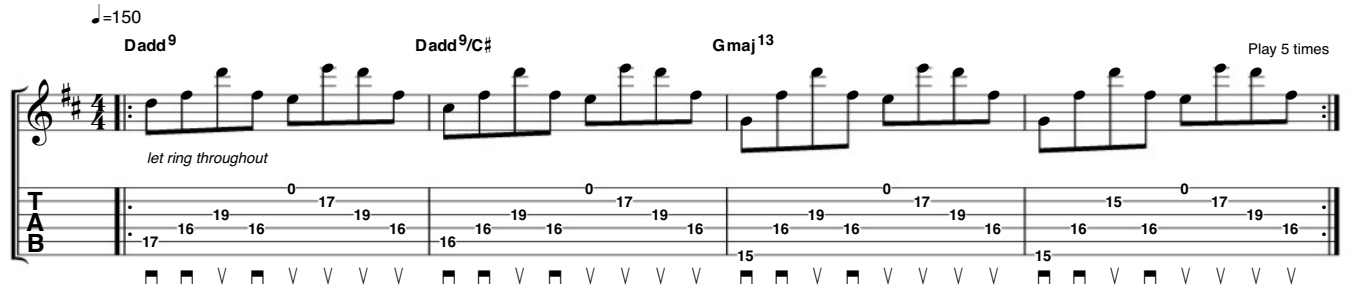
Repeat pre-chorus

Repeat chorus

Solo
D G Bm A5 Asus4 A / x2

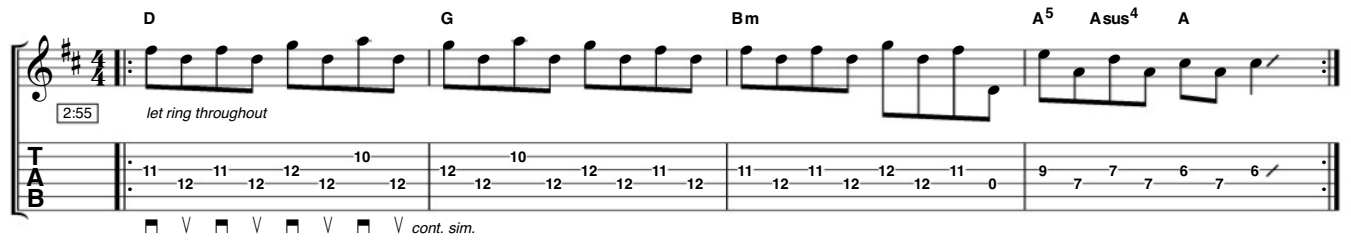
Outro chorus
D G Bm A5 Asus4 A Asus4
I neve - e - er
D G Bm A5 Asus4 A Asus4
I neve - e - er
D G Bm A5 Asus4 A Asus4
I neve - e - er
D G Bm A5 Asus4 A
I neve - e - er

THE KILLERS MR. BRIGHTSIDE Intro/verse **bit.ly/tg375audio**



It's important to cross-reference the fingerings shown in the chord boxouts for these unusual shapes. Alternate picking can be cumbersome at this tempo, so the economy picking shown here is your best option. The important thing to remember is that you'll need to grab that open first string with an upstroke – something that is much easier when the preceding fourth string is played with a downstroke as illustrated.

THE KILLERS MR. BRIGHTSIDE Solo **bit.ly/tg375audio**

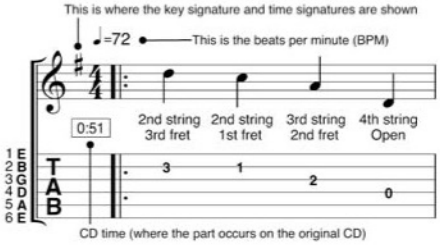


Dave Keuning's solo is based entirely on diads that mirror the underlying chords, rather than simply blasting pentatonic licks over them. Allow the notes to ring by keeping your fingers in position even when fretting higher notes on the same string. Note the use of the open fourth string at the end of bar 3, facilitating the position shift down the neck.

TAB GUIDE

Get more from TG by understanding our easy-to-follow musical terms and signs

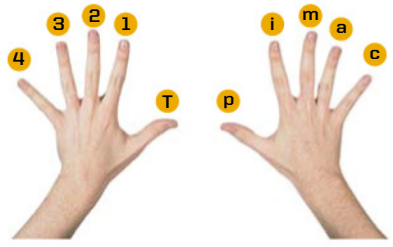
What is tab?



Tab is short for tablature, a notational system used to give detailed information as to where notes should be played on the fretboard. Tab appears underneath conventional music notation as six horizontal lines that represent the strings of the guitar, from the sixth (thick) string at the bottom to the first (thin) string at the top. On these lines, numbers represent which frets you place your fingers. For example, an A note on the 2nd fret, third string, will be shown as a number '2' on the third line down on the tab. Unfretted strings are shown with a '0'. The key and time signatures are shown in the notation. TG also includes a timestamp to tell you where in the original track you'll find each example and tempo expressed in beats per minute.

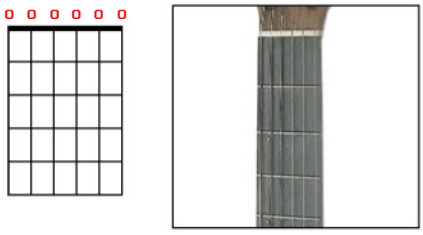
FRET BOXES: CHORDS, SCALES AND CAPO NOTATION

HAND LABELLING



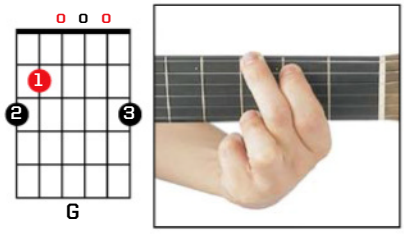
Here are the abbreviations used for each finger. Fretting hand: **1, 2, 3, 4, (T)** Picking hand: **p (thumb), i (index), m (middle), a (annular), c (little finger)**

NUT AND FRETBOARD



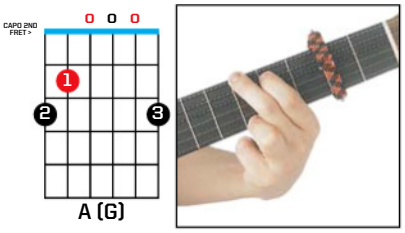
This fretbox diagram represents the guitar's fretboard exactly, as seen in the photo. This design is used for ease of visualising a fretboard scale or chord quickly.

CHORD EXAMPLE



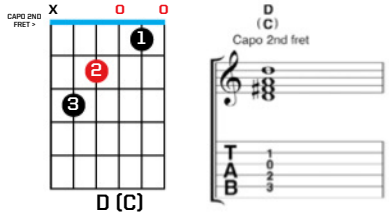
This diagram represents a G chord. The 'o's are open strings, and a circled number is a fretting hand finger. A black 'o' or circled number is the root note (here, G).

CAPO EXAMPLE



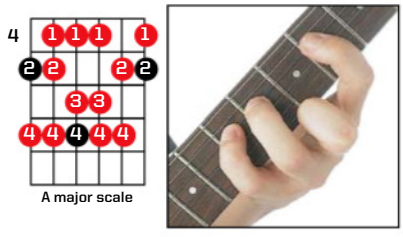
The blue line in the diagram represents a capo – for this A chord, place it at the 2nd fret. Capos change the fret number ordering. Here, the original 5th fret now becomes the 3rd fret, 7th fret now 5th fret, etc.

CAPO NOTATION



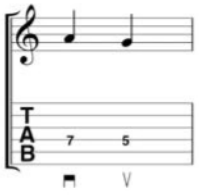
Here the chord looks like a C in the tab, but the capo on the 2nd fret raises the pitch to make it a D. The 2nd fret capo'd notes are shown with a '0' in the tab as if they were open strings.

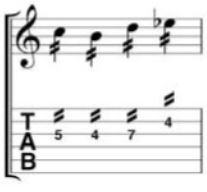
SCALE EXAMPLE



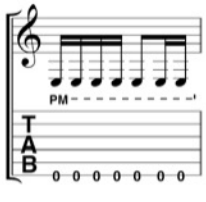
The fret box diagram illustrates the fret hand fingering for the A major scale using black dots for root notes and red dots for other scale tones. The photo shows part of the scale being played on the fourth string with the first, third and fourth fingers.

GUITAR TECHNIQUES: PICKING

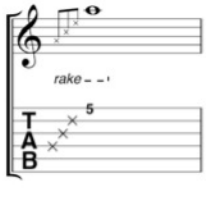
DOWN AND UP-PICKING

The symbols under the tab tell you the first note is to be down-picked and the second note is to be up-picked.

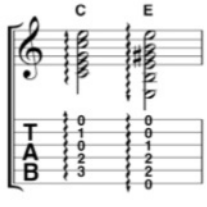
TREMOLO PICKING

Each of the four notes are to be alternate-picked (down and up-picked) very rapidly and continuously.

PALM MUTING

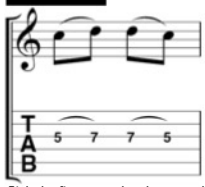


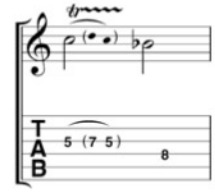
Palm-mute by resting the edge of your picking hand palm on the strings near the bridge saddles.

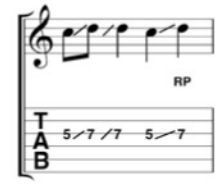
PICK RAKE

Drag the pick across the strings shown with a single sweep. This is often used to augment a rake's last note.

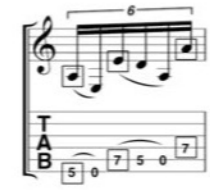
APPREGGIATED CHORD

Play the notes of the chord by strumming across the relevant strings in the direction of the arrow head.

FRETTING HAND

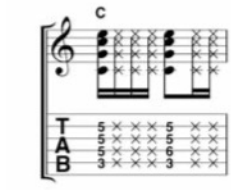
HAMMER-ON & PULL-OFF

Pick the first note then hammer down on the string for the second note. Pick the third note and pull-off for the fourth note.

NOTE TRILLS

After picking the first note, rapidly alternate between the two notes shown in brackets using hammer-ons and pull-offs.

SLIDES (GLISSANDO)

Pick the first note and then slide to the next. For the last two notes pick the first, slide to the next and then re-pick it (RP).

FRET-HAND TAPPING

Sound the notes marked with a square by hammering-on/tapping with your fret hand fingers, instead of picking.

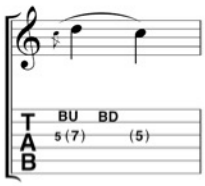
FRET-HAND MUTING



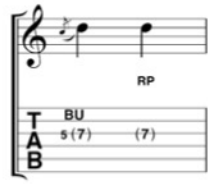
X markings represent notes and strings that are muted by your fret hand when struck by your picking hand.

BENDING AND VIBRATO

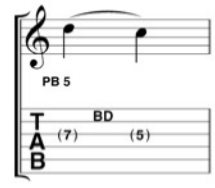
BEND AND RELEASE



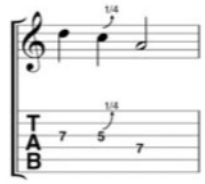
Fret the first note (here, the 5th fret) and bend up to the pitch of the bracketed note, before releasing again.

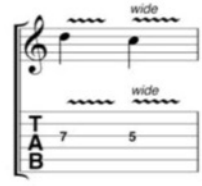
RE-PICKED BEND

Bend up to the pitch shown in the brackets, then re-pick the note while holding the bent note at the pitch shown.

PRE-BEND

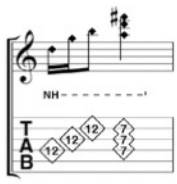


Silently bend the string up from the 5th fret (PB5) to the pitch of the 7th fret note, pick it and release to the 5th fret note.

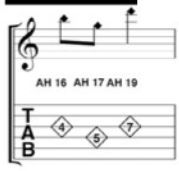
QUARTER-TONE BEND

Pick the note then bend up a quarter-tone (a very small amount). This is sometimes referred to as a 'blues curl'.

VIBRATO

Your fretting hand vibrates the string by small bend-ups and releases. Exaggerate this effect to create a 'wide' vibrato.

HARMONICS

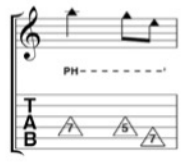
NATURAL HARMONICS

Pick the note while lightly touching the string directly over the fret indicated. A chiming harmonic results.

ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

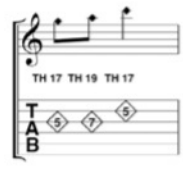


Fret the note as shown, then lightly place your index finger directly over 'x' fret (AH'x') and pick (with a pick, p or a).

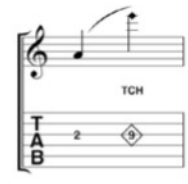
PINCHED HARMONICS



After fretting the note in the triangle, dig into the string with the side of your thumb as you sound it with the pick.

TAPPED HARMONICS

Place your finger on the note as shown, but sound it with a quick pick hand tap at the fret shown (TH17) for a harmonic.

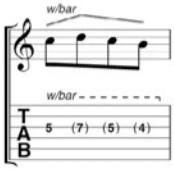
TOUCHED HARMONICS



A previously sounded note is touched above the fret marked TCH (eg, TCH 9) for it to sound a harmonic.

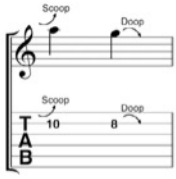
VIBRATO BAR / WHAMMY BAR

WHAMMY BAR BENDS

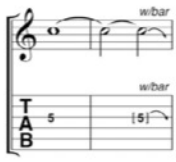


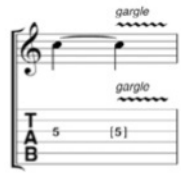
The note is picked as shown, then the vibrato bar is raised and lowered to the pitches shown in brackets.

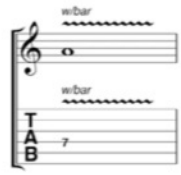
SCOOP AND DOOP



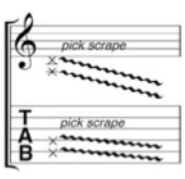
Scoop: depress the bar just before striking the note and release. Doop: lower the bar slightly after picking note.

SUSTAINED NOTE AND DIVEBOMB

A Note is sustained then the vibrato bar is depressed to slack. The square bracket indicates a further articulation.

GARGLE

Sound the note and 'flick' the vibrato bar with your picking hand so it 'quivers'. This results in a 'gargling' sound!

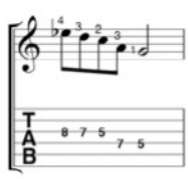
WHAMMY BAR VIBRATO

Gently rock the whammy bar to repeatedly bend the pitch up and down. This sounds similar to fret hand vibrato.

OTHERS

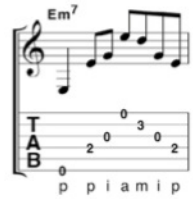
PICK SCRAPE

The edge of the pick is dragged either down or up along the lower strings to produce a scraped sound.

VIOLINING

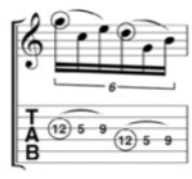
Turn the volume control down, sound the note(s) and then turn the volume up for a smooth fade in.

FINGER NUMBERING

The numbers in the traditional notation refer to the fingers required to play each note.

PIMA DIRECTIONS



Any kind of fingerpicking requirements are shown at the bottom of the tab notation.

PICK HAND TAPPING

Tap (hammer-on) with a finger of your picking hand onto the fret marked with a circle. Usually with 'i' or 'm'.

THE GAS STATION

REAL WORLD REVIEWS OF THE BEST NEW GEAR

Welcome to the GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome*) Station! Every issue, TG scours the market for the hottest new gear and brings you transparent reviews that you can trust. From the smallest of accessories that make your life easier, to big investments, such as brand new guitars, amps and effects pedals – if it's worth your attention, you'll find it here!

HOW WE TEST

CURATION
Our product selection is driven by our love of gear. We select the most exciting products on the market every month to bring you opinions you can trust.

FACE-VALUE REVIEWS
We're not gear snobs here at *Total Guitar*. We judge it on whether it looks good, sounds good and plays well – not by the name on the headstock.

***WHAT IS GAS?**
Gear Acquisition Syndrome is the guitar-player's never-ending urge to acquire new gear, irrespective of whether they actually need it. Don't pretend you don't have it – we all do!

NO SNAKE OIL
You won't find us getting hung up on hokey mythology or nonsense marketing speak: we aim to bring you bullsh*t-free opinions on the gear you're interested in.

WE CAN'T BE BOUGHT
TG review scores are a true reflection of our experts' opinion on the product they've been testing. You'll never find a rating in our mag that has been bought and paid for.

REAL WORLD REVIEWS
We test every product under the conditions that they were designed for. For example, if an amp is designed to be played loud, rest assured that we'll have tested it at rehearsal/gig volumes!

BEST BUY AWARD
TG Best Buy Awards are reserved for stand-out products that earn a 4.5 star overall rating. This is the most exciting new gear that you *need* to check out

PLATINUM AWARD
Reserved for the very best of the best, TG's Platinum Awards are given to class-leading, gamechanging products that score a maximum 5 stars in every category.

★★★★★ SUPERB, A BEST BUY
★★★★½ EXCELLENT
★★★½☆ ABOVE AVERAGE KIT
★★½☆☆ SOME ISSUES
★½☆☆☆ POOR

80 MARSHALL STUDIO JTM HEAD
Marshall channels the vintage warmth of iconic JTM amps in its Studio range

84 THE TG TEST: FENDER TOM DELONGE & STEVE LACY STRATOCASTERS
Fender serves up a heavy dose of pop-punk nostalgia as well as a forward-thinking take on the iconic Stratocaster

90 GIBSON SG STANDARD '61
Back in black, and for a limited time only...

92 GRETSCH G5420T-140 ELECTROMATIC
Gretsch celebrate 140 years with this stunning, sublime-sounding hollowbody

94 J. ROCKETT ARCHER SELECT
One Klone to rule them all

02

01

03

04

05

START ME UP!

Five awesome new products to get your gear engine revving this month...

EHX PICO SERIES

1 Small pedals are big news these days, and EHX has just shrunk the blueprint even further with two new Pico series pedals. First up is the Pico Pog, which puts EHX's legendary Polyphonic Octave Generator inside an enclosure measuring just 92mm x 51mm x 51mm. Similarly, the tiny Pico Platform Compressor/Limiter uses the same size enclosure for a well-stocked compressor pedal; its price is TBA at the time of writing.

£219
www.ehx.com

FENDER 'TO THE STARS' COLLECTION

2 This month's reviews section features the freshly-reissued Fender Tom DeLonge Strat. So, what better accompaniment than straps, picks and cables? The picks and straps proudly wear Tom's To The Stars branding, and the straps are available in the exact same colour options as his signature model, so you can either co-ordinate or contrast. Meanwhile, the cable comes in never-gonna-lose-it Graffiti Yellow.

Picks: £7.99 for six. Cables: £20.99. Straps: £28.99.
www.fender.com

BOSS GM-800 GUITAR SYNTHESIZER

3 Got a guitar? Want synth sounds? Boss' new GM-800 Guitar Synthesizer is packing 1200 of its most advanced synth sounds ever thanks to the ZEN-Core technology found in Roland's flagship keyboards. The tone engine can layer four synth sounds at once, plus it can add a rhythm track using the on-board acoustic and electronic drum sounds. It works in tandem with Boss' newly-announced GK-5 hex pickup, which is user-installable.

£689
www.boss.info

BLACKSTAR ST. JAMES PLUGIN

4 For the first time ever, UK amp builder Blackstar has moved into the world of plugins with its St James amp emulator. Rather than being a straight reproduction of the hardware amp, Blackstar says it has been designed as an amp in its own right. Included in the suite are EL34 and 6L6-flavoured amps, a collection of stompers which can be placed in front of the amp (some can be used in a virtual FX loop), a Post-FX section and Blackstar's CabRig DSP speaker simulation.

$99
www.blackstaramps.com

ORIGIN EFFECTS HALCYON GOLD OVERDRIVE

5 The Klon Centaur provides the inspiration here, but Origin is keen to point out that this is more than just another Klone. While it has a faithful KLN voicing, Origin has also tailored the Halcyon Gold's own voice, and you can jump between the two with a toggle switch. Further to this is the inclusion of Origin's Adaptive technology – as seen in the Halcyon Green and M-EQ Driver – for real-time, dynamic response.

£249

MARSHALL
JTM
STUDIO
MK
II
OFF
ON
LOW
HIGH
INDICATOR
PRESENCE
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
HIGH TREBLE
INPUTS

MARSHALL STUDIO JTM ST20H HEAD

£1075

Marshall channels the vintage warmth of iconic JTM amps in its Studio range

Since the company's acquisition by Zound Industries earlier this year there are signs that things are really on the move again at Marshall. We recently reviewed four classic reissue pedals and here we're looking at a new but long overdue addition to the British-made Studio series, the Studio JTM. Inspired by the original JTM45's built and sold in Marshall's Hanwell music stores, the Studio JTM shares the same reduced size, weight and output power as the other amps in the Studio range, fitting in with current trends for improved portability and neighbour-friendly volume levels.

The cosmetics faithfully recreate Marshall's early 1960s non-offset look, with black and cream vinyl and a silver control panel, topped with a reproduction of the dark red enamel-filled 'coffin' badge, so-called because they were originally sourced from a funeral casket hardware supplier. These badges were phased out after Marshall moved into their first proper factory in Hayes, Middlesex in 1964, to be succeeded by the now iconic gold-topped small script logo used on the black and gold 'plexi' amplifiers. While the styling may be vintage, the Studio JTM's internals feature modern electronics supported on a heavy-duty steel tray chassis. A large main circuit board holds most of the components including the valve bases, with smaller boards for the front panel controls and rear panel jack sockets. The Studio JTM uses the historically correct 5881 power valve, which was standard equipment on Fender's contemporary 4x10 tweed Bassman, the amp on which the original JTM was based. The Studio JTM is typical Marshall, combining a well-sorted design that'll easily take the stick of long tours, with plenty of vintage mojo to gaze at. On a more practical level, smaller transformers and a smaller cabinet add up to a significant weight reduction without any sacrifice in build quality, making the Studio JTM an easy single-handed lift.

Like many vintage designs from the 1960s, the Studio JTM's front panel controls are simple and easy to navigate. Two pairs of high and low gain input jacks feed separate Normal and High Treble loudness controls, with a shared passive three knob EQ and a presence control. Like the other Studio amps, the JTM's standby switch has two 'On' settings, one delivering the full 20 watts output and the other reduced to a (slightly) more studio and neighbour-friendly 5 watts. Around the back, there's a pair of send/return jacks for the series effects loop and a speaker-emulated line/recording output. Plugging into the line out doesn't mute the loudspeakers; there's no internal dummy load, so make sure the Studio JTM is connected to a loudspeaker or a suitable attenuator before switching on.

The Studio JTM's preamp channels aren't footswitchable, however you can link them with a short patch lead. In this 'jumpered' mode, the two loudness (volume) controls become the Studio JTM's primary tone controls – the Normal

1 THREE POSITION STANDBY SWITCH
The Studio JTM has a three-way standby switch that delivers the full output 20 watts or a studio/home friendly 5 watts, with a central standby.

2 MARSHALL 'COFFIN BADGE'
Early JTM's featured this so-called 'coffin badge', sourced from a funeral casket hardware supplier. Later amps switched to the iconic gold-topped small script logo.

3 LINE OUT AND EFFECTS LOOP JACKS
In common with other amps in the Studio Series, the JTM features a speaker-emulated line out/recording jack and a series effects loop with a defeat switch.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp.

OUTPUT: 20 watts RMS, switchable to 5 watts RMS

VALVES: 3 x 12AX7, 2 x 5881

DIMENSIONS: 500mm (w) x 230mm (d) x 240mm (h)

WEIGHT: (kg/lb): 9.5/21

CABINET: Birch plywood.

CHANNELS: Two permanently-on Normal and High Treble.

CONTROLS: Normal Loudness, High Treble Loudness, Bass, Middle, Treble, Presence.

FOOTSWITCH: None.

CONTACT: Marshall Amplification, www.marshall.com

> "THE JTM NAILS THE CLASSIC SOUNDS OF THE MID-1960S"

Photography Phil Barker

The 5881 factor

The glass bottle that gave early JTM45's their sound

It's common knowledge that the first Marshall amplifiers were influenced by Fender's 5F6A 4x10 Bassman. It might have been intended for bass, but guitarists quickly discovered the Bassman's perfect balance of tone, volume and overdrive when pushed hard. The Bassman used the 5881 output valve, a ruggedised version of the contemporary 6L6WGB, designed and produced by the legendary Tung-Sol Electric company of New Jersey. The 5881's tight bass and distinctive glassy treble made it ideal for guitar amplifier use and Marshall followed Fender's lead, using them in the earliest JTM45's. However back in the early 1960s, USA-made products like the 5881 and the Fender Bassman were difficult to import. Marshall briefly changed to a home-grown 6L6 alternative, the superlative KT66 made by Marconi-Osram Valve, before settling on the widely available and better-priced EL34 in 1965. This change was pivotal to the emergence of the 'Marshall Sound' of the late 1960s.

channel's fat warmth can be blended in to tame the raucous edginess of the High Treble channel, using the regular EQ and presence controls to fine-tune things to taste, with the bonus of a little extra gain to help things along. With the volume controls kept below halfway, the Studio JTM's glassy highs and punchy bass response make it an ideal platform for pedals, with a wide frequency response that flatters modulation effects. Alternatively, if you want the full-on vintage experience, turn off the effects loop, crank up the volume controls and use a fuzz or treble booster to drive the front end. While this amp sounds great with any guitar, it responds really well to powerful humbuckers and we had the most fun using it with our PAF-equipped Gibson Les Paul, producing satisfyingly authentic British Invasion-era tones.

If you're after an amp with plenty of 'I want' vintage appeal combined with modern reliability and portability, Marshall's new Studio JTM is a great choice, nailing the classic sounds of the mid-1960s, while capable of sounding very contemporary, with the extra versatility of switchable output power and an effects loop. Aimed at vintage purists as well as modern pedalboard users, we reckon this deceptively simple Bletchley-made head is versatile, great value for money and definitely worth a closer look.

Nick Guppy

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★½
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

ALSO TRY...

VICTORY SHERIFF 25 £1199

Victory's Sheriff 25 is a modern two-channel head that uses a pair of EL86's (a beefed-up EL84) to sound authentically vintage or modern as needed.

LANEY LA30BL £919

Laney's EL34-powered LA30BL draws on its own 1960s Black Country heritage for a satisfyingly classic tonal experience.

FENDER SUPERSONIC 22 £1349

For a more full-on USA tone, Fender's dual 6V6-powered Supersonic 22 head ticks all the boxes for a wide range of vintage and modern sounds.

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Words Daryl Robertson Photography Olly Curtis

FENDER LTD ED. TOM DELONGE STRAT & STEVE LACY PEOPLE PLEASER STRAT

Fender serves up a heavy dose of pop-punk nostalgia as well as a forward-thinking take on the iconic Stratocaster

Fender's artist range reads like a who's who of rock royalty, and whether it's the flamboyant Jimmy Page Tele, the metal-ready Jim Root Jazzmaster or Kurt Cobain's southpaw Jag, there's always been something for every type of player – a fact exemplified by the Californian giant's latest releases. While on the surface, it may look like this duo of signature Strats are just simple variations on the tried and true formula from 1954, in reality, they showcase just how much can be done with this classic design – and how important an artist's vision is to their signature instrument.

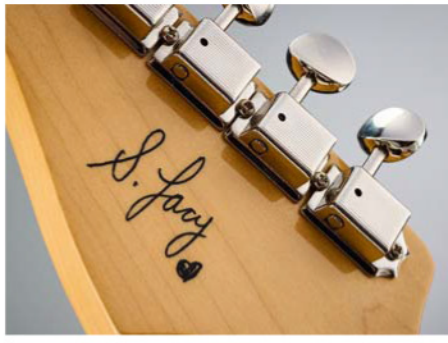
The first of these new six-strings comes courtesy of R&B superstar, Grammy-winner and songwriter extraordinaire, Steve Lacy. This eye-catching Strat perfectly combines tradition with contemporary to create a Swiss Army knife of tone that can handle any genre thrown at it.

Featuring the beloved Player Plus Noiseless single-coil pickups, a modern deep C neck, vintage-inspired narrow-tall frets and the fierce Chaos Fuzz circuit, Lacy has clearly put his own unique stamp on the legendary Strat design – but will it live up to its People Pleaser name?

Next up is arguably the most hotly anticipated guitar of the year – well, certainly among pop-punk fans – the Tom DeLonge Signature Stratocaster. Yes, that's right, the streamlined punk powerhouse is back with a vengeance. The original run was unfortunately discontinued in 2004 when DeLonge was enticed over to Gibson with his own ES-335, but luckily the re-released Strat is just as you remember it, albeit with a couple of tweaks.

Featuring the unaccompanied Seymour Duncan Invader humbucker that helped DeLonge craft his iconic sound, a solitary volume control and a slew of colourful finish options, this Strat is as simple as it gets and that's what we love about it.

These two world-renowned artists have taken the basic blueprint of the Strat and moulded it to fit their musical needs, resulting in two guitars that are at entirely opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of feature set and sonic approach. Which would you choose?



FENDER STEVE LACY PEOPLE PLEASER STRATOCASTER

£1,299

This modern Strat aims to please

Beautifully presented in a period Fender case with velvet green interior, this slick Strat could be mistaken for a retro throwback. However, once you plug it in, you'll quickly realise it's certainly not another vintage reissue. The tonal heart of this beautifully-crafted guitar is a trio of Player Plus Noiseless single-coil pickups which provide the spanky tones you've come to expect, minus the pesky hum. Better yet, these pickups have the perfect output – being hot enough to drive the amp when needed but not so aggressive that they lose their dynamics and charm.

Under the hood, Lacy has hidden his secret weapon – the aptly named Chaos Fuzz. Activated using the S-1 switch, located where you'd typically find the second tone control, this built-in fuzz will transform your sound at the push of a button. While some may see it as a gimmick, we found it to be an inspiring and welcomed extra.

If you're hoping to channel your inner Jimi, you'll be disappointed as the distortion here more resembles the Big Muff, and unfortunately, there's no way to adjust the gain. While having a volume for this circuit is excellent, a dual concentric pot could provide more flexibility. The neck here is Fender's "Deep C" profile with a 9.5" radius and narrow-tall frets, resulting in an extremely comfortable guitar that should feel like an old friend to vintage guitar fanatics.

Much like its creator, the People Pleaser oozes personality and charisma. From the pair of dice at the 12th fret to the checkerboard vibrato cover and hot pink Chaos Burst finish, this axe is as visually striking as it is sonically pleasing.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
NECK PROFILE: Deep C
FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 9.5"
FRETS: Narrow Tall
PICKUPS: 3 x Player Plus Noiseless Strat
CONTROLS: Master Volume, Master Tone, Fuzz Output Volume, S-1 Fuzz Switch
FINISH: Chaos Burst

FENDER LIMITED EDITION TOM DELONGE STRATOCASTER

£1,299

A DeLonge time coming...

It feels like a lifetime since the original run of DeLonge Strats hit the scene, but that doesn't mean their popularity has faded. Instead, they've developed a cult following, with second-hand prices reaching new heights once it was announced Tom had reunited with his former Blink-182 bandmates. Naturally, the rumour mill started turning immediately, with speculation of a signature Starcaster in the works and, of course, the return of the stripped-back Strat.

In stark contrast to the Steve Lacy Strat, DeLonge has forgone all extras in favour of the bare essentials – a single pickup and volume control, as well as a hardtail construction. Just like the original, the new 2023 model boasts a solo Seymour Duncan Invader humbucker, which is precisely what's needed for hard-hitting punk rock. The tone is aggressive, defiant – and dammit, we love it.

That's not to say that Tom's basic Strat is entirely devoid of features, though. The lone master control is equipped with a treble bleed circuit which helps preserve the high-end when you roll off the volume – ideal for when you want to get a little cleaner.

The neck here is wide, flat and super comfortable, and the addition of a slab rosewood fingerboard is a nice touch. The modern medium jumbo frets lend themselves perfectly to lead work, with bends ringing out as clear as a bell.

Okay, so Fender isn't trying to reinvent the wheel here, and nor do they need to. For us, this pared-back Strat is the ultimate pop-punk machine, with stunning finish options, superb build quality and a tone to die for.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
NECK: Maple
NECK PROFILE: Modern C
FINGERBOARD Radius: 9.5"
FRETS: Medium Jumbo
PICKUPS: Seymour Duncan Invader
CONTROLS: Master Volume with Treble Bleed
FINISHES: Surf Green, Daphne Blue, Black, Graffiti Yellow

FINAL VERDICT

The question is: do you want a no-nonsense punk rocker or a sophisticated tonal chameleon?

It's probably unfair to pit these two signature Strats against each other as apart from sharing the same basic shape, they are entirely different instruments. We see the Tom DeLonge Strat has a pop-punk hammer. It's powerful, straightforward and the perfect tool for pounding away on heavily distorted powerchords. In contrast, Steve Lacy's Strat is more akin to an electric multi-tool. This sleek and contemporary option has heaps more functionality and is ideal for a number of situations. That said, sometimes a hammer is the best tool for the job.

The DeLonge is a finely-tuned instrument that is designed with one thing in mind, and it absolutely nails it. From the treble bleed circuit to its oversized headstock and array of finish options, we love the care and attention that has gone into this signature axe – because, as we know, all the small things matter.

Now, while it's great to see the return of a modern classic, it's also refreshing to see Fender give younger artists the recognition they deserve. Lacy's eclectic tastes and far-reaching musical endeavours have resulted in one of the most unique and creatively inspiring guitars Fender has ever produced.

FENDER STEVE LACY PEOPLE PLEASER STRATOCASTER

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★½
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★☆
PLAYABILITY	★★★★☆
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

FENDER LIMITED EDITION TOM DELONGE STRATOCASTER

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★☆
PLAYABILITY	★★★★☆
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

OUR GENERATION
Tom Ford plays **Top Tape** flatwound electric guitar strings:
in production and used on era-defining records since 1961
ROTOSOUND®
@rotosound_uk

GIBSON SG STANDARD '61

£1,899

Back in black, and for a limited time only...

Anyone who attended the 1991 Monsters Of Rock festival at Donington Park, England, or has whiled away a Friday night, supping cold ones and enjoying AC/DC's heroic headlining set on video, will recognise this SG. It's a dead ringer for Angus Young's weapon of choice on the night. Finished in Ebony, with a rosewood fingerboard and acrylic trapezoid inlays, the five-ply teardrop pickguard, the MOP 'pineapple' inlay on the headstock – it's a classic. This you might think should be an evergreen staple of the Gibson USA lineup alongside the Vintage Cherry variants and yet it's a limited run European exclusive for Peach Guitars. We don't have the answer why Gibson doesn't have this available 24/7, 365 days a year, but they should.

The SG Standard '61 is a Les Paul design, introduced in a time when Gibson momentarily discontinued the now-storied singlecut. Famously, Mr L. Polsfuss did not love the SG. The rest of the world did. The number of SG players, and the diversity of styles they play, speaks to its versatility. There's something fundamentally appealing about the SG build. Great designs always have an element of simplicity. It has a heavily bevelled mahogany body, a SlimTaper C profile neck (also mahogany) that joins the body at the 22nd fret, opening up all of that fretboard for exploration. At first, an SG can feel all neck, as though the 24.75" scale length was a conservative ballpark estimate. But once you acclimatise it is incredibly comfortable, lightweight, under 7lbs, and that neck profile strikes a fair compromise between speed and comfort.

Gibson says these '60s Burstbuckers are voiced for "added power and top end", and they are not wrong. With everything up on 10, fully open, the bridge 'bucker is all puckish treble, but it's not ice-pick to the front row. There is depth. It's musical. There are mids. Whether working open chords with a little drive, digging into a bend, or playing a downtuned doom-metal riff at C#, it has bite and clarity. Backing off the treble, say, to seven on the dial, takes some of the edge off. The control loom is tidily hand-wired with Orange Drop capacitors, and so when you do adjust these dials the sound actually changes. The neck pickup is labelled 'Rhythm' on the poker chip washer, but from ripping piano-esque cleans for jazz through to rich blues tones and nasal high-gain leads, anything goes. The middle position is the wild card; now *this* is a rhythm tone…

With its tidy build and slinky factory setup, there's very little to complain about. You can see why Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Angus Young, Tony Iommi, Robby Krieger, Derek Trucks *et al* made the SG their own. It's stripped down yet versatile, a platform for rock 'n' roll and a lot more. Thankfully, it now comes in black.

Jonathan Horsley

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★½
PLAYABILITY	★★★★½
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

1 BODY
Finished in a coat of nitrocellulose lacquer, this Ebony paint job will age nicely over the years, acquiring that nice checking that comes with a vintage instrument. It ain't cheap, but think of this as a Murphy Lab instrument in the making. Just add time.

2 PICKUPS
These '60s Burstbuckers are a superb match for the SG. The bridge pickup is gnarly, quick to show its teeth, not shy on the treble. The neck pickup has a more rounded EQ and complements it nicely. But that middle position with a dimed tube amp is open-chord heaven, and a good third voice for riff-writing.

3 FRETBOARD
With its lightweight, no-frills build, this SG is front-to-back a player's guitar, and it is designed to let you access all 22 frets. We're not telling you to over-play, but it's the sort of guitar you can get carried away on.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Solidbody electric guitar
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, SlimTaper 'C'
SCALE LENGTH: 24.75" / 628.65mm
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech / 43.05mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 12" radius with acrylic trapezoid inlays
FRETS: 22, Medium Jumbo
PICKUPS: 2x Gibson USA '60s Burstbuckers
CONTROLS: 3-way pickup selector, 2 x volume, 2 x tone
HARDWARE: Vintage Deluxe with Keystone Buttons, ABR-1 Tune-O-Matic bridge with aluminium stop bar
CONTACT: **Peach Guitars,** peachguitars.com **Gibson,** gibson.com

Total Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

Photography Olly Curtis

GRETSCH
Bigsby

GRETSCH G5420T-140 ELECTROMATIC £949

Gretsch celebrate 140 years with this stunning, sublime-sounding hollowbody

In celebration of this year's landmark 140th anniversary, Gretsch has released an all-new Double Platinum Collection of guitars in stunning two-tone finishes. The Chinese-built hollowbody G5420T-140 we're looking at here comes from the company's mid-tier Electromatic range and features a laminated maple body, maple neck, 625mm-scale laurel fingerboard, a pair of Filter'Tron humbuckers and a Bigsby B60 tremolo for a dash of classic vintage shimmer.

Now, while you pay an extra £50 above the price of a standard G5420T, you do get some premium appointments in the form of the chrome/pearloid pickup covers, anniversary badge and *that* limited edition finish. Looks may be subjective, but we suspect the styling alone may justify the price for many. Two things strike us upon picking the G5420T-140 up. First, acoustically, it sounds great. It's sweet and resonant, and it's got us excited to hear how well this translates to its amplified tone. Second, the action, fretwork and intonation are all first class – low and comfortable beyond the 12th fret, without the slightest hint of fretbuzz – exactly how we like it.

Upon plugging in, the FT-5E Filter'Trons (a development of the company's original design from the '50s) offer up plenty of detail in the top end, with a deep, rounded bass response that's full and articulate, without any boxiness that some hollowbodies can exhibit – and it's a case of pure Gretsch character here. Select the bridge pickup for Brian Setzer twang, or kick in some distortion for Reverend Horton Heap psychobilly and Billy Duffy drive tones. Middle and neck positions reward clean tone playing, light strumming, Chet Atkins style fingerpicking, and, if you roll back the master tone a little, it's a decent jazz guitar.

Trestle block bracing (dampening the top by mating it to the back, roughly alongside the pickup edges) is employed here to attenuate the tendency of hollowbody guitars to feed back at high gain. It certainly works to some extent, resisting the dreaded squeal at moderate drive/high volume settings on our Hughes & Kettner Tubemeister 1x12. It's claimed that this bracing method also increases sustain – and we can well believe it. Classic Gretsch tone and beautiful ringing sustain are big plus points here. A Graph Tech NuBone nut ensures smooth string motion at the headstock end – which makes the most out of the idiosyncrasies of the Bigsby trem design and tuning remains stable provided you 'shimmer' rather than 'bomb'!

Our review model developed a faulty potentiometer (which our contacts at Gretsch repaired) – but this can't take away from the joy of playing the G5420T-140. Stunning looks, sublime tone and fantastic playability combine to make this a highly desirable guitar for anyone looking to add a hollowbody to their collection.

Chris Bird

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★½
PLAYABILITY	★★★★½
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

1 FINISH
The stunning two-tone finish is Pearl Platinum on the top and Stone Platinum on the rear and neck.

2 PICKUPS
The FT-5E Filter'Trons appear on a few Gretsch models, but are offered on the anniversary model with pearloid/chrome covers.

3 NECK & FINGERBOARD
Equipped with 22 medium jumbo frets and featuring a bend-friendly 12" radius on a 24.6" scale fingerboard, the "C" shaped neck is a comfy playing experience.

Total Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Hollowbody electric guitar
BODY: Laminated maple
NECK: Maple, classic 'C'
SCALE LENGTH: 24.6" / 625mm
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech NuBone / 42.86mm
FINGERBOARD: Laurel, 12" radius with pearloid hump block inlays
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
PICKUPS: 2x FT-5E Filter'Tron
CONTROLS: 3-way pickup selector, volume 1. (neck pickup), volume 2. (bridge pickup), master volume, master tone
HARDWARE: Adjusto-Matic bridge with secured laurel base, Bigsby B60 tailpiece, vintage-style open-back machine heads
CONTACT: Gretsch, gretschguitars.com

Photography Olly Curtis

J. ROCKETT ARCHER SELECT £349

Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

One Klone to rule them all

The Klon Centaur is an object of desire for many players, but current asking prices for an original are not even worth thinking about unless you are rock royalty. No worries though, just about every stompbox company has a 'Klone' in their roster. There is a catch, however… Bill Finnegan, original Klon designer, believes that his stock of particular 1N34A germanium diodes are essential to the true Klon sound, so the type of diodes in a klone might be a consideration for someone buying one. If that is you then you may wish to check out J. Rockett's Archer Select which has a choice of no less than seven types of clipping diodes onboard including IN34As.

The pedal has a default set of OA10 diodes in the circuit operated by one footswitch but a second footswitch toggles to a second set of diodes that are selected from a 6-way rotary switch – that way you'll always have two variations available underfoot. The rotary switch arranges five NOS germanium diode sets in order of increasing output and adds a sixth position, even louder, that uses LEDs for the clipping.

The thing about clipping diodes is that they are only doing their job when they are clipping and that's at higher drive settings. In this pedal the differences between the seven sets only really become apparent beyond midday on the Gain knob and those differences in tonality and playing feel are really quite subtle. To our ears, any one of them could give you the taste of a Klon being used as a drive pedal, but they provide the opportunity for finding a favourite to best suit your rig.

Many players prefer to use a Klon as a transparent boost and amp driver with little or no gain dialled in, so the choice of diodes in that role is less crucial, but whichever way you choose to run, this pedal it sounds excellent and does the exact job that a Klon would, with the diode choices giving it a versatility that sets it apart from other Klones – albeit at a higher price point…

Trevor Curwen

> "THE VERSATILITY HERE SETS IT APART FROM OTHER KLONES"

SUMMARY

FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★★

AT A GLANCE

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Boost/Drive pedal

FEATURES: Buffered Bypass, 7 different clipping options (OA10, 1N270, 1N695, 1N34A, D9B, D9E, Red LEDs), DI output

CONTROLS: Output, Treble, Gain, Clipping selector, DI Groundlift switch, Bypass footswitch, Clipping footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, standard DI output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) <100mA

DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 110 (d) x 45 mm (h)

CONTACT:
J. Rockett Audio Designs, rockettpedals.com

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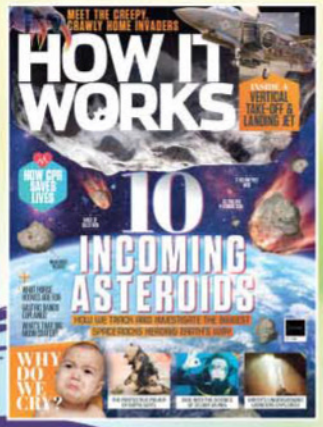

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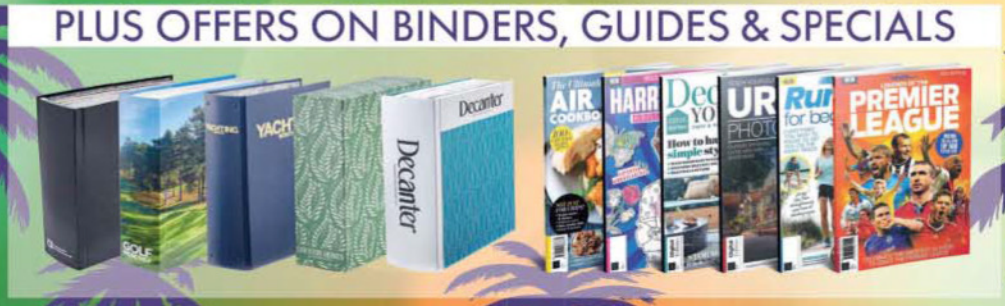

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Words Ellie Rogers

JAMES AND THE COLD GUN

Picture the scene: two ultra cool young musicians – both named James – are brought together under one roof during a surreal detention of global proportions and spend the next 18 months writing songs in their garage, cranking their amps and waiting not so patiently to be allowed out to play. Then, in a "fairytale kind of moment," their music gets heard by a rock-star-turned-record-label-owner on the other side of the Atlantic, and they find themselves catapulted directly into their wildest dreams.

Nope, it's not the plot of the feel good musical movie of the summer, it's the story of James And The Cold Gun – a band of plucky punk 'n' roll upstarts from Cardiff who are well on their way to big things.

"One of our songs ended up getting played on KEXP," recalls lead guitarist James Biss, who's still on a high from recently supporting Guns N' Roses at BST Hyde Park when we chat. "Stone Gossard from Pearl Jam was just driving through Seattle in his car, listening to the radio. He heard our song and sent us a message on Instagram." With that, James And The Cold Gun became Loosegroove Records' freshest signing – their gloriously jagged self-titled, self-produced debut LP landing this summer like a cluster bomb of raucous riffs and unchecked energy.

"We were getting so fed up with 90 per cent of the stuff on rock playlists being stuff where you don't even know if you can hear a guitar," explains frontman/guitarist James Joseph, who wields a '94 Korean-made Epiphone Flying V, makes a sport out of irking sound engineers with his enthusiasm for feedback, and reckons it's "a proper bummer" when "layers of electronics" get in the way of a good tune. Instead, the pair inject their music with the spirit of the "early noughties guitar rock revival", with bands like Queens Of The Stone Age, The Hives and The Darkness being major sonic touchstones.

Biss chooses a Rickenbacker 330 Mapleglo for its "super spiky" single coils and jangly tone, and, according to his bandmate, takes care of "all the bits that sound good in our music."

The pair have recently become Laney artists and craft their tones using LA30BL valve amps – modern descendants of the Supergroups that Tony Iommi used to define the meaning of 'heavy' back in the '70s. "They're 30 watts, which means you can actually turn the volume up to 5 to get some of the amp tone," explains Biss, before Joseph, unable not to grin in the process, hops in to profess his love for the amps' wicked good looks and retro-styled "big knobs," to boot.

RICKY BISS-NESS James Biss holds aloft his 330 Mapleglo

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